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Man against metal in a weird world

BEYOND THE WALLS OF SPACE

By S. M. TENNESHAW

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Front cover painting by Ed Swiatek and Julian Krupa,
illustrating a scene from "Beyond the Walls of Space"

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The OBSERVATORY

..... *by the Editor*

LAST WEEK we attended one of those fabulous press receptions they drum up in New York on the slightest provocation. This particular one was held at the city Planetarium—a fitting locale considering the occasion.

THE OCCASION? To introduce to the ladies and gentlemen of the press a new science-fiction television series—one that'll have Mom and Pop shoving Junior away from the set so they can get a better view. It's entitled "Tales of Tomorrow", will be on the network (ABC) weekly, and judging from the first of the series, shown a few days after the press party, is the best thing of its kind to be beamed into the country's front parlors.

BUT RIGHT now it's the reception we want to tell you about. The agency that put it on really went all out to give it an "out-of-this-world" atmosphere. Invitations were distributed by a special messenger: a guy about seven feet tall and made up to resemble an advertising tycoon's conception of what a colleague on Mars would look like. And a good job too: offices were knee-deep in swooning secretaries and receptionists in his wake. The invitations themselves were in the form of small telescopes, with the necessary information lettered on the sides.

Nearly two hundred guests showed up: newspaper columnists, representatives of national news magazines, newsreel men, a few literary agents, several science fiction editors and a respectable number of sf writers. They milled about the huge circular room, eyeing the replica of the solar system in motion in the ceiling overhead (something you'd have to see to believe!), and generally behaved in the subdued and genteel manner you would expect of such a group.

THEY HAD a "woman of the future" and "man of the future" roving around the joint to whip up a little color. Whoever dreamed up their costumes had plenty of imagination but not a very good grasp of the practical, for the guy wore what looked like a coil bedspring around his head and a suit resembling a pair of Dr. Denton pa-

jamas for infants. The gal turned out a little better, but as far as her costume was concerned, nothing to make you long for the good new days.

Nobody had to go hungry. The appetizers were the same unappetizing fingernail-size sandwiches filled with inner-tube ham, library-paste cheese, and Plymouth Rock chicken salad with the rocks left in. A few apologetic anchovies cowered behind the wrinkled olives but were never in danger. That, however, is the kind of stuff handed out at every cocktail party since the Cro-Magnons had the boss in for dinner, and nobody really minds. The liquid refreshments were fresh and frequent, and that always covers a multitude of the usual sins.

AFTERWARD, everybody moved to a huge room on the floor above. It resembled a circular theater, with the domed ceiling the screen. Some forty or fifty color transparencies of back cover paintings used in past years on *Amazing Stories* and *Fantastic Adventures* were projected on the ceiling, one by one, with Fletcher Pratt doing a running commentary for the benefit of those in the audience who had never been further out in space than the top of the Empire State building. Following this, the Planetarium put on a visualization of what the end of the world would be like, and everybody went home scared to death.

—HB



State of the art...he's bringing back a specimen!



An "Amazing" Vignette

Flaherty's Lucky Day

By
E. Bruce Yacher

"ILL GIVE you the whole lot for five bucks," The Pawnbroker scratched his balding head. "Take it or leave it. I don't want to break up the set."

Flaherty studied them once more. The micrometer was a beauty, all right, but what the hell were the rest of the gadgets? They didn't look like any tools he'd ever seen.

"O.K." He shrugged. "I'll take 'em, but I don't know what good they'll do in the garage. The mike's a honey, though."

He paid the five dollars and took the small package the pawnbroker wrapped. Good thing he'd stopped and asked about the mike. The guy seemed to be a jerk, letting go a good mike for five bucks. Of course the rest of the junk wasn't worth a dime. Probably some kind of instrument tools—certainly no good in Flaherty's Garage.

When he got back to the garage Flaherty didn't go to work right away. It was a hot afternoon and the beer in the ice bucket was mighty tempting. Let Clayton's Buick wait awhile. He'd get at it in due time.

He opened the package of tools and examined them. He put the mike on the rack. He didn't have to check that. It was good even if there was a "Starrett" trade name marked on it. A good mechanic can tell by the feel of a tool whether or not it's worthwhile.

He puzzled over the rest of the stuff, though. It was just as shiny and in as good condition as the mike but none of the items bore any familiar shape. Some were short and chunky, some slim and delicate. The words "tools" didn't even seem to apply. Certainly they weren't intended for hands; maybe they were for machines. But Flaherty had worked in machine shops and still he didn't understand them.

He chucked them aside and finally went to work. He was replacing the shocks on the Buick and a stubborn nut wouldn't give. Setting the box wrench firmly, he looked around for something to pound it with. The mallet was on the bench and he didn't want to bother crawling from under

the car. He wanted something heavy.

That might do. He grabbed a short, chunky piece of metal from the tool kit—or whatever it was—he had discarded. He began to hammer against the arm of the wrench, giving it torque-shocks bound to loosen the nut.

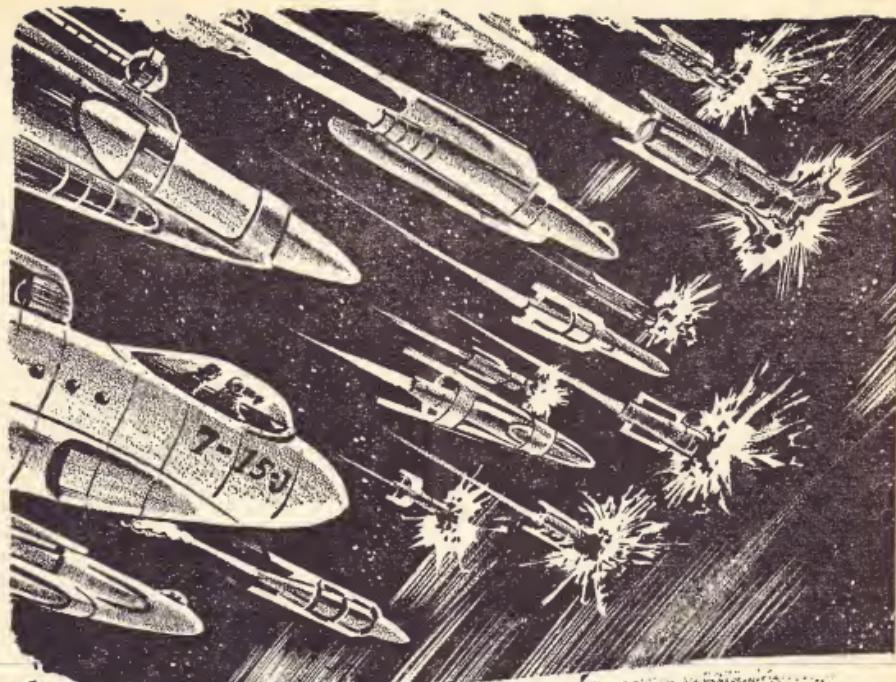
He struck the wrench once, lightly—and the bolt gave.

He was surprised. Still holding the slug of metal in his hand, he took away the wrench, intending to put a socket on it and spin away the nut. Funny, but the slug of metal felt stiff and rigid, as if it were attached to something. Then he saw the bolt move! Experimentally he turned the slug of metal in his hand and the nut, ten inches away, started to turn too! It was just as if some magnetic field linked the object from the tool kit and the nut, a magnetic field that did the work and required only the slightest guidance.

It took Flaherty a week before he found out that he possessed a set of tools unlike any ever before seen on this Earth, and he didn't talk about them. But the tools in his already skilled hands made his work effortless. They acted as if possessed by an intelligence of their own. Nothing made of metal balked them. He nearly died of shock when he discovered that a harmless-looking sliver of metal, if properly squeezed, cut through steel like a knife through cheese!

Flaherty had the tools three weeks and then somebody stole them, although he hadn't told a soul about their existence. They just disappeared and Flaherty often tells about them now, swearing that he'll kill the man who took them....

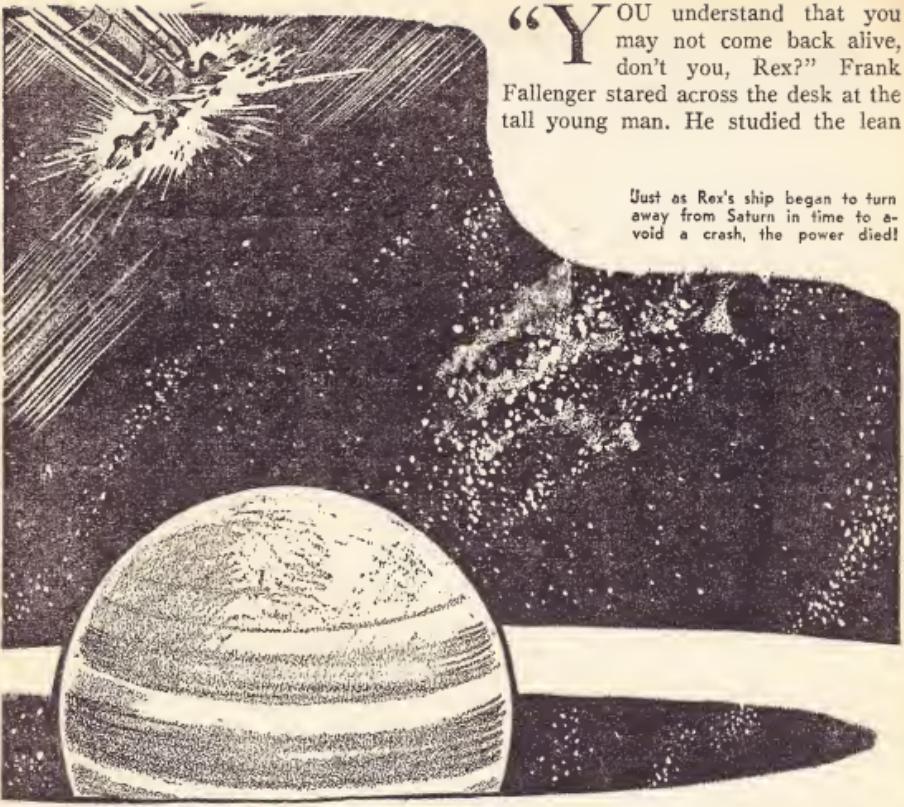
But the tools aren't gone. In a manifold of n-dimensional space utterly beyond Flaherty's ken, but remote in distance only in inches, the machine shop of the Kinner works steadily away, repairing *grens* and constructing *whahmes*, and the apprentice mechanic *Guelf* still smarts from the stinging punishment he received for once misplacing a set of tools and not finding them for an hour, an expensive and important set of tools....



by S. M. Tenneshaw

BEYOND





“YOU understand that you may not come back alive, don't you, Rex?" Frank Fallenger stared across the desk at the tall young man. He studied the lean

Just as Rex's ship began to turn away from Saturn in time to avoid a crash, the power died!

THE WALLS OF SPACE

Blair watched the flames engulf John Masters
But there's more than one way a man can burn...

hard features for some indication of the effect his words had had. There was none. The eyes of Rex Blaine were steady and there was no fear in them. They were cold and sharp. Sharp with cold, grim purpose and determination.

A sudden smile tugged at Blaine's lips. "If I come back, Frank, I'll be alive. If I don't..." He shrugged the thought off fearfully, but the smile remained.

Fallenger sighed. "All right. So you're not going to back out. God knows you'd have every right to. Even with blastoff scheduled for dawn tomorrow."

"I'm not backing out. We don't have to go through that again. Has the ship been checked?"

Fallenger sighed deeply. "Checked and rechecked. Just as every other flight was checked. From the first to the last—the one John Masters captained."

The smile faded from Blaine's lips at mention of Masters' name. He stared thoughtfully at Fallenger for a long moment, saw the questioning look in the eyes of the Rocket Base Director.

He could see in them the same story that must have been in his own. A story that went back two years to the first experimental flight into space beyond the Moon. Man questing for the planets and beyond. Man who had conquered space to the Moon. That had been the first step, the Moon. A big one, but only the first. The next step to the planets and beyond had then been taken. A ship had blasted off into the void.

It had never returned.

There had been others afterward. Ships with many improvements. They flew all right to the Moon. They sailed across that two-hundred-and-forty-thousand-mile stretch of space with

ease. But then they pointed their noses to the stars—and vanished.

The last to take this second step had been John Masters. Masters, a good rocket pilot, one of the top men in his graduating class at the Lunar Base School. Masters was a cool man, as smart as they came. He had gone into space in a ship that had been checked from stem to stern; on paper that ship should have been able to reach Pluto and back without refueling. Had he reached Pluto? Had he even reached Venus? They would never know. Masters was gone—like the others. And now—

"What about the radio equipment?" Blaine asked, breaking the sudden strained silence. "I want to be in contact with base at all times."

"Triple checked. You won't have any trouble with it."

AGAIN the smile tugged at Blaine's lips. But now there was a touch of grimness to it. "That's what we thought before. Six months ago we told Masters the same thing about his equipment..."

Fallenger got to his feet from behind the desk and started to pace slowly back and forth in the room.

"That's the one thing I can't figure, Rex. Sure, a ship can be hit by a meteor—although the odds against every flight ending like that are beyond reason. But it's the radio equipment cutting out that gets me. And just like clockwork, out in the middle of space with the nearest planet still hundreds of thousands of miles away—pffff! A crackle of static and that's all. I tell you it borders on the uncanny."

"I'll check with you every five minutes, Frank."

Fallenger stopped his pacing and nodded. "Good. Now what about your crew?"

"Two of the best. Ned Kline on ra-

dar and radio; George Carter, my master technician."

"How do they feel about it?"

Blaine shrugged. "Like me they have no ties, family or otherwise. They won't back out."

"Then it's all settled." Fallenger's voice held an odd tightness. He walked around the desk and stopped in front of Blaine. "You'll be careful, Rex?"

"Careful men don't leave Earth, Frank. We did. Space is a gamble any way you look at it. I'll do my job. Let's leave it at that."

Fallenger nodded slowly and there was deep respect in his eyes. "I wish I were going with you, Rex. But—"

Blaine shook hands with the older man, understanding. Then he turned to the door. "You'll be out on Ramp Five at blastoff?"

"I'll be there."

Blaine nodded and strode from the room, closing the door behind him.

BLAINЕ walked slowly across the Lunar ground from the control building toward the barracks. The powdery pumice beneath his boots made a sloughing sound that seemed to whisper ominously. He glanced up toward the plasti-dome that covered the base like some vast bubble. Up through the artificial lighting of the fluoro-screens toward the vast crystal-clear blackness of outer space beyond the dome. The stars were brilliant pinpoints up there, steady, untwinkling. They looked as if you could reach out and touch them, pluck them from their ebon blanket.

He thought of the other men who had looked at those same stars as they crossed the pumice landscape of Luna. They had reached out in their silver rockets, shot from the airlocks through the dome and out into space. They had reached—what? Were their bodies floating in some erratic orbit in

space even now? Was the memory and knowledge of their failure a warning to other men such as he? Was man incapable of reaching the other planets and eventually the stars beyond them? Was space a wall too difficult to climb?

He knew this wasn't true. Man had conquered space. He had had to, to reach the Moon. Space could be no different out toward Venus, or Mars, or Pluto. It was a vacuum and man had shot his metal ships into it successfully. But only to the Moon...

As he neared the barracks he glanced off to the left toward the rocket ramps. There were ten of them, lined in a single row. All were empty now, with the exception of Number Five. In its cradle lay a long, sleek tapering rocket, its nose pointed into the cylindrical tube that connected the airlock with the dome above. The ship was waiting.

He felt a sense of pride as he looked at the ship. For it was his. And once he left Luna the stars would be his too. He would not fail. He must not fail. He would succeed—and return.

He entered the quonset-like barracks building and strode down the hall toward the quarters allotted him and his crew. As he opened the door he could hear the clink of glasses.

"Well, just in time to drown your sorrows, Captain. We're drinking to tomorrow—and hoping it won't be our last!"

George Carter grinned at him as he closed the door. He nudged the shorter man beside him. "Come on, Ned, pour Rex a drink."

Blaine smiled at them in return. "Just one. Then we're going to catch up on some sack time."

Carter grimaced. "Sleep? Why waste the last few hours we're sure about! Not me, Captain!"

Blaine took the drink that Ned

Kline handed him. He saw the radio man shrug toward Carter. Blaine nodded and looked back at George Carter. Was the man showing a case of nerves? The first sign of a breakdown?

"You're not afraid, are you George?" Blaine asked quietly as he lifted the glass to his lips.

Carter's laughter sounded forced. "Afraid? Me, Rex? You ought to know better than that!"

Blaine's eyes fixed steadily upon Carter's florid features. "I know you've got as much guts as any man, George. That's why I picked you for this assignment. When I asked if you were afraid I meant of something we don't know about. After all, there's a chance we won't come back either."

Blaine had planned his words carefully. There was no sense in dodging the issue with either of his men, he knew. And there was still time to get a replacement if it was necessary.

Carter's face sobered. "Maybe I have gotten a little edgy, Rex. I've been wondering if man isn't being told politely he has no business out in space. And I don't mean by any physical force either..."

Blaine nodded. "I see. Religion has finally caught up with you. Well, maybe it's a good thing."

Carter flushed in embarrassment. "There's nothing wrong in that."

Ned Kline smiled. "Of course not, George. As long as we don't let it interfere with our work. Hell, I've been thinking of a few choice prayers myself."

Some of the tenseness left Carter's face and he grinned. "You praying? That's a laugh. I've heard everything now!"

Blaine walked over to a bunk bed set against the far wall and sat down. "Well, now that we've got the fear of the Almighty accounted for, what about the ship?"

Ned Kline put his glass down on a table. "We made a final check while you were in the Commandant's office. Everything is all set."

Blaine nodded. "There's no possibility of the radio failing?"

"Not a chance. I'll—"

His voice broke off suddenly as there was a thudding sound in the hall outside the room.

BLAINE got to his feet quickly, a frown on his face. He heard Carter exclaim: "What the devil was that?"

As the man spoke, there was another sound. A low stifled groan. And with the groan the thudding came again beyond the door.

Blaine stepped forward quickly, putting his glass on the table as he hurried to the door.

He pulled it open.

In the dim light of the barracks hall he saw the huddled figure of a man on the floor. He was lying face down, his clothing torn and ragged. Blood was flowing down his right arm and there was a trail of it on the wood floor.

Blaine stood staring down at the figure in shocked surprise. Then he was aware of Ned Kline standing beside him.

"Good Lord, Captain, what's happened?"

"I don't know, Ned. Come on, let's get him into the room."

They reached down and grabbed the man under his armpits and lifted him from the floor. It was then that Rex Blaine saw that the figure was holding something tightly clenched in the fingers of his right hand. It seemed to be a crystal globe of some kind. As they moved him, groans slipped from the man's lips.

"Come on, into the room, quick!"

Blaine held on to the man's left arm while Ned Kline supported him

from the opposite side. Together they half-dragged him back into the room.

"Over on the bed!" Blaine snapped. He was aware suddenly that George Carter was standing in their way, his mouth open in astonishment. "George, out of the way!"

But Carter didn't move. Suddenly he lifted a shaking finger and pointed at the man. His voice came with an overtone of incredulous fear.

"Rex—that man—it can't be! That's *John Masters!*"

Blaine almost dropped the heavy figure. For an instant his eyes flicked over to Ned Kline. The radio man's features had grown suddenly pale, for he was staring down at the bowed head of the man they supported. Almost fearfully Rex Blaine looked down.

He could never have mistaken that profile. The long, thin, angular features. Even with the smear of blood covering them he knew that George Carter was right. It was impossible. It was beyond the realm of reason. But it was true. The man he and Ned were holding was the lost space commander, John Masters!

"Merciful God!" Ned Kline's voice was awed. "George is right, Rex. It is Masters!"

Blaine nodded numbly and motioned once again to the bed. "Let's get him over there!"

They moved swiftly then. Carter came up behind them and lifted the injured man's feet on to the bunk as they slipped a pillow under his head. It was then that Blaine saw the searing burns that slashed diagonally across the man's face. Burns so terrible that the flesh was already blackened.

He stared down at the figure, his mind refusing to believe what he saw. And as he looked the man's lips parted and another low groan slipped from them. Behind him, he heard Ned Kline exclaim.

"He needs a doctor—in a hurry!"

Blaine nodded. He half turned. "Get over to headquarters building, Ned. Notify emergency. And," he hesitated a moment, "get Fallenger over here. But don't say a word to anyone else. Understand?"

Kline nodded and hurried from the room. A moment later Blaine heard the door at the end of the hall open and slam shut.

Then he turned back to the injured man. "George, get a drink, quick."

CARTER moved away from the bunk and Blaine leaned over the still figure. The man's lips were parted slightly, and a thin trickle of blood was running from them down the seared chin. A gurgle of sound issued from deep in Masters' throat and his fingers, clutching the strange globe-like object, tried to move upward but fell again limply upon the bed.

"Masters! John! Can you hear me!" Blaine clipped the words out.

The man moved feebly once again, as if he were struggling to lift his consciousness from some deep abyss.

"Give him this, Rex." George Carter's voice sounded in Blaine's ear. He turned and took the partly filled glass of amber fluid and turned again to the man on the bed.

Gently he raised Masters' head from the pillow and put the edge of the glass at his lips. Slowly he tilted the glass until the fluid ran into the unconscious man's mouth.

There was a sputtering gasp from the unconscious figure as the whiskey ran down his throat. Then suddenly he groaned deeply and his eyes flickered open.

Blaine's lips were tight as he stared into those eyes. He saw pain there. A pain so terrible that death would have seemed a blessing. And he saw fear. A strange fear, deep and incomprehensible. And, finally, there

was recognition.

Masters' eyes flickered and fastened upon Blaine's. The man's lips moved in a tremor and Blaine lifted the glass to them again.

"Here, John, take another swallow. Easy now."

This time the whiskey went down easier. Masters coughed as he swallowed, and strength seemed to pour back into his tortured face. Then his voice came. "Low, distant, pain-wracked.

"Rex—thank God—I made it..."

"Easy, John. Don't try to talk now. You need your strength...."

Masters' head shook feebly. "I don't have...much time. Lura's men nearly trapped me—got away just as—their heat rays reached me..."

Blaine stared at the man in stupefaction. He knew that at any other time, if it had been any other person, he would have thought the man delirious. But this was too bizarre. Appearing as if from the dead, John Masters lay before him now, his face and body horribly burned by some fantastic weapon or source of power. As Blaine stared at the man, he knew that Masters was right. He didn't have much time.

"All right, John. Talk as much as you can. What happened to you? Where have you been? What—"

"The wall—Rex...Space...Beyond the wall...Thallom..."

The words came out in staccato sounds, seemingly unconnected. Blaine listened to them desperately, trying to piece them together.

"What wall, Masters? What about space? And what is Thallom?"

Masters tried desperately to get up to a sitting position on the bed. Blaine half-lifted and supported him. "Space—impenetrable—except beyond—Saturn—channel through the wall—to Thallom...Warn Earth—tenth planet. Lura's science superior..."

Masters' voice choked off and Blaine frowned as he sought to make sense out of the man's words.

"Try to be clearer, John. What is Thallom? Is it another world—a tenth planet in our solar system?"

Masters' head bobbed weakly. Suddenly he raised the strange globe-like mechanism in a trembling hand. Blaine saw that its surface was clear and smooth on one side, the glass, or whatever material it was composed of, opaque. On the other side was a series of multi-colored buttons. As he looked at them Masters depressed one of them with a trembling finger.

Almost at once the opacity of the globe vanished. In its place was a shimmering light. And then the light settled down into a pattern and he suddenly seemed to be looking into a three-dimensional screen. His breath caught in his throat as he seemed to be staring down at a fantastic city nestled in a huge valley between two jagged mountains.

"Thallom—Lura's city..."

Blaine tore his eyes away from the scene and spoke desperately to the injured man. "Masters! How did you get here! How!"

Masters clenched the globe tightly in his fingers. "Teleported—stole tele-globe from Tagath..."

Blaine reached out for it, tried to take it from Masters' fingers. The man pulled away savagely. And Blaine's hand accidentally depressed one of the other buttons by the sudden movement.

THE GLOBE sparkled with light and suddenly another scene sprang into three-dimensional focus. Blaine found himself staring into a fantastic room. Rich draperies flanked floor-to-ceiling windows at one end. The floor itself seemed to be some gleaming metal of a splendid mosaic pattern. Ultra-modern sections of furniture

were set at various points in the room. But it was not at the furniture or the windows or the floor that Blaine was staring. His gaze was riveted to a great screen set in one wall and the woman who sat before that screen, her fingers poised over a series of controls.

She was the most beautiful woman Blaine had ever seen. Her body was clad in a revealing gown of shimmering material. Her breasts, barely concealed by the gown, rose and fell in a supple motion. Her hair was long and golden and fastened at the nape of her neck by an emerald-studded net. But it was her eyes that held him.

They were wide and deep and green. The eyes of a cat. Sleek, piercing, and beautifully evil. As he looked at her the screen before her suddenly flashed into light and a scene registered. Blaine stared in amazement at himself and John Masters—exactly as they were in the room. He could even make out Carter standing in the background, his eyes wide with astonishment.

As he looked the eyes of the woman met his. There was a flash of sudden surprise in her gaze. Then her gaze had swept past him and centered on Masters.

The injured man let out a sharp cry as if he had first become aware of what had happened. "Lura!"

And as Blaine watched, the woman's eyes filled with a triumphant hate. Her voice seemed to come out of nowhere filled with a rich, passionate anger.

"You thought you could escape me, John Masters! But you will not tell your tale among Earthmen! You shall die here on Thallom!"

Even as she spoke her fingers reached for a set of controls beneath the great screen. And John Masters fumbled weakly with the globe in his hands.

"No!—You will not take me back—"

Blaine shot to his feet from the bunk. His mind failed to grasp what was occurring; he knew only that somehow that globe must be destroyed. He reached out and tried to tear it from Masters' hands. But the injured man showed a sudden spurt of strength. His arm shot out and pushed Blaine roughly. "Get away—Blaine!"

It was a warning cry, and Blaine, not expecting the move, toppled backward against Carter. Even as he was shoved off balance he heard the door at the entrance to the barracks open and feet pounding in the hall.

It happened so fast he wasn't sure he saw himself what occurred then. One moment he was trying to regain his balance, and watching the globe in Masters' hand. He saw the woman Masters had called Lura twist a dial. The scene exploded into a blaze of light. At the same time he heard a fearful scream from Masters.

And then Blaine's mouth dropped open in amazement.

John Masters had vanished.

He heard George Carter cry out. "He's gone! Captain—he's vanished!"

Blaine sprang forward to the bunk. His hands searched the rumpled surface of the bed as if he expected to encounter an invisible solid there. But there was nothing. Nothing but the rumpled bedding where a moment before John Masters had lain.

"What's going on here?"

Blaine turned away from the bed to stare at Frank Fallenger entering the room. Behind him came Ned Kline, and in the hall he could see the white-coated figure of one of the base medicos.

It was Carter who muttered numbly: "He vanished, sir! Right before our eyes! That woman twisted a dial or something and—he vanished!"

AMAZING STORIES

Fallenger stared from the mechanic to Blaine. Blaine nodded. "That's right, Frank, I swear to God it's right. Masters was here—on this bunk only a few moments ago!"

Fallenger's lips were grim. "Now look here, Rex. If this is some kind of a joke!"

"I tell you it's no joke! Masters was here! I saw him—spoke to him!" And as rapidly as he could Blaine outlined what had happened. As he spoke he saw the disbelief grow in the Director's eyes as he looked from Blaine to the bunk and back again.

"And you're trying to tell me that a man who vanished months ago suddenly appears here on the Moon—in the hall outside your room? What is this, mass hypnosis? Are you sure you men haven't got a bad case of nerves?"

BLAINE tightened his lips and walked to the door of the room. He pointed to the floor outside. "If it's nerves, Frank, how do you explain this?"

Fallenger looked down at the floor of the hall. In the light from the room a small pool of blood glistened. Slowly the Director raised his eyes to Blaine. There was a grimness in them now.

"If this is true, do you realize what it means?"

Blaine nodded slowly. "It means that every ship that has left the Moon for one of the planets has been captured or destroyed by an intelligent power."

"It also means war, Rex. One of the planets in our system is highly advanced—apparently more advanced than we are. The question is, which one?"

It was Carter who broke in suddenly. "But, sir, Masters kept mentioning a tenth planet—a world named Thallom!"

Fallenger shook his head. "There is no tenth planet in the solar system. You can't hide a planet."

As the Director spoke, Blaine's mind raced. He remembered what Masters had said about a wall in space. Or was it—beyond the wall... A wall in space...

"Maybe a planet could be hidden, behind a wall...." He spoke the words to himself.

"What was that?" Fallenger asked.

Blaine looked at him, shrugged. "Nothing. I was thinking out loud." But he saw Fallenger eyeing him thoughtfully.

"I'll have to make a report of this to Earth," Fallenger said suddenly. "We'll have to change our plans. Organize an exploratory fleet, armed with the best weapons we have."

Blaine stepped close to him. "Sir, you're not thinking of cancelling our flight?"

Fallenger looked questioningly at him. "I can't very well ask any man to take a risk such as this. Besides, this is a matter for the military."

Blaine shook his head. "It's less of a risk now than it was before. At least we know we're facing an intelligent force somewhere in space. Now, we know what we're looking for. Before, we were shooting blindly. That's why the other ships—Masters' included—didn't come back."

"You mean you want to continue as planned?"

"I think it's the only way, Frank. Besides, when we return you'll be able to turn in a complete report, and if we're lucky we may have definite information."

Fallenger looked skeptical. He turned suddenly to Carter and Kline. "And what do you men think about going now?"

Carter's florid features were eager now. "You couldn't keep me off that ship, sir. Besides, if we can find this

Thallom, we may be able to find Masters..."

"Carter's right, sir," Ned Kline added. "And I agree with Captain Blaine. I want to go."

"I don't know.... This may be contrary to regulations now that we know what we do."

Blaine cut in. "You're forgetting about Masters and the other men who went before him, aren't you Frank? Maybe the regulations owe them something."

Fallenger bit his lip at the sharpness in Blaine's words. Finally he nodded. "All right, Rex. I suppose you're right. We'll carry out our plan on schedule. But remember, take no unnecessary chances."

Fallenger turned then and left the room. Blaine closed the door and looked at Carter and Kline. "Well, we're going. How do you men feel?"

"I feel like having a damned strong drink," Carter said heavily.

"We're going all right, but where?" Ned Kline stared at them thoughtfully. "In some ways we know even less now than we did before."

As Carter poured each of them a drink Blaine shook his head. "No, Ned, we've got a course. Masters mentioned Saturn. That's where we're headed."

"And from there?" the radio man asked.

"We'll cross that bridge when we come to it." Blaine lifted his glass in a toast. "To a brave man: John Masters."

They drank silently. And Rex Blaine saw once again a strangely piercing pair of green eyes staring into his. He wondered if he would ever see them in person....

"**B**LASTOFF minus sixty."

Rex Blaine sat tensely before the controls of the rocket ship, his eyes fastened to the visiscreen. He

heard Ned Kline announce the sixty-second mark. One more minute. Sixty seconds that were now passing like an eternity.

In the screen he could see the small group of men gathered near the headquarters building below them. Frank Fallenger would be down there watching and waiting. The only other Earthman who knew the real and dangerous truth about their flight. It was a comforting thought, Blaine realized. For even if they didn't come back there would be someone left to warn Earth.

"Blastoff minus thirty."

Ned Kline's voice droned monotonously behind him. Blaine's fingers tensed over the controls. In the screen he saw the roof of the airlock slide back, exposing the rocket to the vacuum of space and the stars.

"Blastoff minus ten."

"Prepare to blast!" Blaine's voice answered, and automatically he checked the acceleration belt fastening him to his seat. It was in order.

"Blastoff!"

Blaine's fingers depressed the firing studs. There was a deep rumble of power in the rear of the rocket. The metal ship shuddered in its cradle and in the screen Blaine could see the red glare of the rocket flames illuminating the Lunar Base.

Then suddenly the roar of sound grew to a crescendo and Blaine felt himself pressed back against his seat with a terrific force. The Lunar Base fled beneath them and the ship shot into the blackness of space, away from man....

FRANK FALLENGER depressed the intercom switch on his desk. "Parkins, I'm leaving for Earth shortly. I'll report to HQ there. Take over the Base until I return. Keep Blaine and his crew in contact at all times."

The voice of his assistant came back

crisply. "Right, sir. Shall I see you off?"

"That won't be necessary. I'll take one of the private ships. That is all."

He switched off the set and leaned back in his chair. He drummed his fingers together for a moment and a look of satisfaction crossed his features. Then suddenly, he leaned forward, opened a drawer in the desk and removed a strange object to the top of the desk.

It was a small globe-like object, opaque, with a series of multi-colored buttons set in one side. A smile pulled at Fallenger's lips as he picked the globe up and turned it in his hands.

He depressed one of the colored buttons.

The globe sprang into glaring light and then a scene grew clear in a three-dimensional focus. He was staring into a lavishly furnished room, draperies running from floor to ceiling at the windows, the floor a strange metallic mosaic. Seated before a large screen, staring back at his image, a regal woman of golden hair and sensuous green eyes.

Standing beside the screen, around her, were a number of guards. Between them they held a limp figure, its head bowed, its features showing deep, terrible burns.

"Tagath reporting," Fallenger said crisply.

The woman nodded. "I have been worrying, Tagath. What of the Earthmen this John Masters contacted?"

"I thought it best that I not attempt to kill them here, Queen Lura. That would have aroused suspicions. I have sent them on their journey into space. Their ship has just left the Moon."

The woman's beautiful features glowed triumphantly. "And the tall handsome one..."

Fallenger frowned at the inflection in her voice. "He is dangerous, but we will take care of him when we bring

his ship to Thallom. I shall be there personally to attend to him, my Queen."

"You have prepared for your absence from Earth and its satellite?"

"All arrangements have been made," Fallenger replied. "And what of the Earthman, Masters?"

The features of Lura grew cold. "He shall pay for his escape, Tagath. And those who assisted him will be found and will pay also. The Earthman's death will be a warning to all of Thallom who dare to oppose me."

She arose from the controls of the screen and stepped in front of the guards holding the limp figure of the injured Earthman. Her hand lashed out in a stinging blow against Masters' face. The man stirred with pain as the wounds of his face opened and blood seeped from them.

"Prepare to die, Earthman. Just as all of your race shortly will feel the might of Lura!" Her voice was cold and merciless. She reached to one of the guards and took from him a silver weapon. She pointed the muzzle of the weapon at Masters and motioned the guards to stand aside. They did so and Masters sagged to the metallic floor. His pain-wracked eyes glared up at the woman and he fought his tortured body to his feet.

"I am not afraid to die—you will never defeat Earth—or men like Rex Blaine... He has seen you and is warned..."

Lura, Queen of Thallom, laughed in his face and depressed a firing stud in the weapon she held. A thin needle-ray of flame tore into Masters' body. He gave a single piercing shriek of agony and collapsed to the floor.

Lura held the weapon pointed at Masters' body, firing the sizzling rays into it until it was nothing but a smoking char of carbonized matter.

Then calmly she handed the weapon back to the guard and motioned to

the others. Their faces were stoic as they gathered up the still-smoking remains of what moments before had been a man. As they left the chamber she turned back to the screen.

"Thus shall all of Earth feel the power and might of Thallom!" Her eyes were wild with a savage light, and Fallenger's lips were tight with passion as he nodded.

"I shall come to attend to Blaine and his crew, my Queen."

Some of the fire left her eyes. There was a distant look in them now. "Yes, return to Thallom, Tagath, I have need of your services. There are traitors in our midst who thirst for revolt. They shall feel the heat of the ato-ray and the Arena even as the Earthmen shall!"

"I hear and obey, my queen," Fallenger replied.

His fingers lifted the globe from the desk and he depressed one of the multi-colored buttons. There was a flash of brilliant light from the globe and for a moment the area of the desk seemed hidden in its radiance. Traces of ozone filled the air.

Then, just as suddenly, the glare was gone.

The chair behind Fallenger's desk was empty.

He had vanished....

"I'VE GOT Lunar Base, Captain," Kline announced.

"Good, I'll take over," Blaine replied and switched on the radio control in front of him. "Hello, Luna. Blaine speaking. Is this the Director's office?"

The set crackled. Then: "Parkins, assistant Director, speaking. What is your position?"

Blaine frowned. "Is Director Fallenger there?"

The crackling of the set. "Fallenger has returned to Earth to report. He left instructions for me to keep in

contact with your flight. Report, please."

The frown grew on Blaine's face at this news. What could have been so important to make Fallenger leave for Earth? Somehow, Blaine felt, this was not right. Fallenger had been specific in his request that they keep in direct communication at all times. Fallenger, alone, on the Lunar Base, knew the gravity of the situation....

"Blaine reporting. We've crossed the orbit of Mars. Heading out toward Saturn."

He heard Parkins gasp. "But what were your orders, Captain Blaine? I thought Venus was to be the destination of your first run."

Blaine smiled to himself. Of course Parkins wouldn't know. And then the seriousness of the situation became more apparent to him. Without Fallenger on the other end he would have to use his own initiative. What had made Fallenger leave? Had he decided to report to the Council on Earth and send out a reconnaissance fleet? But no, that couldn't be true, because if Fallenger had done that he would have left orders for Blaine to return....

"I am following orders from the Director," Blaine replied to the Lunar Base. "I will keep in touch with you. That is all."

"Acknowledging." Parkins' voice came hesitantly. Then Blaine switched off the set.

Carter came forward in the small control room. The technician had a puzzled look on his florid features. "What was all that about, Captain? I thought Fallenger was going to be in touch with us personally."

Blaine nodded. "So did I. You know as much as I do right now."

Kline broke in, turning from his seat at the radio controls. "You told Parkins we were heading for Saturn. I don't remember Fallenger giving

orders like that."

Blaine stared into the visiscreen at the blackness of space ahead. "That was my idea, Ned."

Carter snapped his fingers. "I remember! Masters said something about Saturn—and a wall in space!"

Blaine's eyes flicked to the technician briefly. "That's right, George. It isn't much to go on, but that's all we have. Whatever power Masters ran into had something to do with Saturn."

Ned Kline leaned forward, staring into the visiscreen. He pointed to a rapidly glowing ball in space surrounded with an aura of hazy rings.

"That's Saturn out there! If you're right we may be in a danger zone right now..."

Blaine studied the screen. Kline was right. They were approaching the ringed planet. He could see the hazy outline of the asteroid belts that girded the planet, whirling around it at fantastic speeds. A feeling of wariness gripped him. Was it possible that even now they were under the careful scrutiny of alien eyes? Were sensitive instruments plotting their course? What had Masters meant by a wall in space?

"By God, maybe Masters meant that Saturn was the base of an alien force!" Ned Kline sounded excited.

"I don't think so," Blaine clipped. "He mentioned a tenth planet beyond the wall."

"But that's impossible!" Carter said heavily. "If there was a tenth planet in the solar system we'd know about it."

Blaine's eyes were grim upon the fast-approaching planet Saturn. "We don't know what happened to the other space flights that left the Moon. Perhaps we don't know as much about our solar system as we think. Or maybe we know as much as this intelligent force wants us to know!"

Ned Kline pointed anxiously at the

planet Saturn. "There's something strange about that planet, Rex. What makes it glow like that? Look at those rings of asteroids!"

Blaine studied the scene closely. Yes, that was strange. A planet does not give off light; it only reflects it. Yet Saturn and its rings, under their close scrutiny now, seemed to be actually glowing. Blaine knew it could not be the reflection of the sun's rays. Sol was too distant to account for the amount of radiation present.

"Contact Lunar Base!" Blaine snapped.

KLINE twisted back to his radio controls and began sending out the call signal. "Lunar Base, attention! Interplanetary expedition reporting. Answer!"

There was a crackle from the receiver. Finally the answer came, distant, but clear. "Lunar Base, Parkins speaking. Report."

Blaine nodded to Kline and switched on his own set. "Hello, Parkins. We are approaching Saturn. Planet and asteroid rings have strange glow. Seems as if there is an aura of force emanating from the world. Will proceed with caution."

As he spoke, Blaine adjusted the controls of the ship and set their course in a wide swing of the planet that shortly would take them to the opposite side of the world.

"Keep in contact, Captain Blaine," Parkins' voice came over the set.

Behind him, Blaine heard George Carter gasp. "Captain—look at that asteroid belt!"

Blaine looked. What he saw made his lips grow to a thin tight line. In the whirling rings of millions of asteroids a few would be thrown from the orbit they followed periodically. And as he looked he saw a large chunk of space rock hurtle from the orbit of the planet and shoot through space

in the general course of direction they themselves followed. through to them! We're jetting out of here—"

Blaine hit the retard jets hard and felt the ship respond. The asteroid shot past them at tremendous speed, to hurtle into the blackness of space beyond Saturn.

"That was close—" Carter started to breathe easier behind Blaine, but his words cut off in mid-sentence.

Blaine gripped the controls in amazement as he saw the asteroid suddenly explode in a dazzling flare of brilliant light ahead of them. It was over in the twinkling of a second. Then there was only the blackness of space.

"My God—that damned hunk of rock exploded!" Carter's voice held awe.

But something clicked in Blaine's mind suddenly. He remembered what Masters had said about a wall in space. A wall... "That asteroid didn't explode!" Blaine clipped out. "It struck something!"

"Hello, Blaine... Parkins speaking. What's happening? Report!"

Blaine threw full retard to the jets and turned the ship from its course. He felt beads of perspiration rise on his forehead. Grimly he realized that but for a freak accident their ship would have hurtled into whatever field of force lay out beyond Saturn. Instead of that chunk of space rock exploding it might have been them...

"Hello, Parkins, hello—" Blaine started to speak. But he heard only a sharp crackle and sputtering from the radio. He turned swiftly to Kline. "Ned, what's the hell's wrong with the set?"

The radio man was working frantically with the controls. He looked anxiously back at Blaine. "I don't know—the set's working perfectly but I can't raise Lunar Base. We were cut off!"

"Cut off?" Blaine snapped. "Get

the snap and crackle of the radio set rose in volume. "I can't get through!" Kline shouted. "There's a force field cutting us out!"

Blaine nodded. "All right then, hold on. We're going to take full jet away!"

He punched the controls of the ship and for a moment the ship responded with a surge of power. The nose of the rocket began to turn away from Saturn and head back into the solar system. Then just as suddenly the power went dead.

Blaine swore and worked at the controls. But the ship failed to respond.

"Carter! See what's gone wrong with the power!"

THE TECHNICIAN hurried from the control room. Blaine worked frantically with the dead controls, throwing in the emergency drive. But that too failed. He heard Ned Kline's worried voice at the radio controls.

"They must have spotted us, Rex! Whatever power they've used to cut out our radio signals must have been used on our jets! We've come into a trap!"

Carter came running back into the control room. His face was beaded with nervous sweat. "The whole damned power system is dead! I can't do a thing back there!"

Blaine sank heavily back against his seat. He turned slowly to them, his eyes grim. "Well, it looks like we went too far. We're caught, just as Masters and the others must have been."

Carter wiped his face nervously. "We're like a sitting duck out here! All they have to do is throw one of those space rocks at us or—"

"Or push us into whatever destroyed that space rock, is that what you mean?" Blaine finished for him.

Carter nodded. Blaine shook his head. "I don't think so. Whatever force is behind this could easily have left us crash into that energy field out there and we'd have ended up like that asteroid. No, I think they've got other plans..."

Even as Blaine spoke the ship gave a sudden lurch. Blaine grabbed the controls with a desperate prayer. But they remained dead. And yet, he knew, the ship was moving.

Without a sound, with no sense of motion except for that brief lurch, the rocket was accelerating. As Blaine watched the visiscreen he saw their course change and the nose of the ship head back for the planet Saturn and the asteroid belt.

"We're moving!" Carter's voice was edged with fear.

Blaine himself felt a touch of dread. It was uncanny, eerie, being guided by an invisible hand, as easily and surely as if they were but a pawn upon a gigantic chessboard. He saw once again in his mind's eye that evil, beautiful face he had seen in the globe Masters had held. Those deep hypnotic green eyes. The sensuous face and supple beauty that went with them. And a name. Lura... Anger boiled in Blaine. He hated that face. He hated the smug assurance and triumphant beauty of it. He remembered the cry of fear Masters had given. And now...

Now they were moving faster, ever faster, without sense of sound or motion toward the glowing planet ahead. Blaine's fists clenched as he watched, helpless to do anything. If this course kept up in minutes they would crash into the asteroid ring. Was that the plan?

Even as the thought crossed his mind the ship veered in its course and slewed to the right of the asteroid ring. As they shot by it one of the jagged rocks broke from its orbit and hurtled beyond them out toward the

distant reaches of the void. But, as before, suddenly the asteroid exploded into a brief flare of intense light. As if it had struck an impenetrable wall and been atomized instantaneously.

"We're going to strike that energy field!" Ned Kline shouted close to Blaine's ear.

Blaine could only stare ahead in mute tension. He waited for the impact, the shattering explosion that would snuff their lives out in a burst of disrupted energy. Now—now—now!

Then their ship was past Saturn, past the whirling rings of asteroids.

"We went *through* it!" George Carter breathed heavily.

Rex Blaine tensed at the visiscreen. For he saw something there now that he had not seen before. And what he saw brought a startled cry from his lips.

"Look!"

It was a world. A world of a vast size. A planet that overshadowed Saturn and dwarfed it to insignificance. A great body in space that must have been equal in size to Jupiter. They hovered over it, rushing ever closer.

Blaine's mind refused to believe what his eyes registered. He knew it was impossible that this great planet could have been on the other side of Saturn and invisible to their eyes. Saturn, a planet itself, seemed to be but a satellite!

Blaine was aware that Kline and Carter were staring in mute astonishment along with him. There were no words to exchange. Their faces showed the incredulous fascination that his must have shown. Finally it was Blaine who spoke.

"This is what Masters was trying to tell us about—the tenth planet, Thal-lom! A world invisible to us on Earth, surrounded by an impenetrable wall of force. We're beyond that wall

now. A man-made wall. We're up against a science that makes our own seem ridiculous. God only knows what is next...."

As if in answer to his words the ship sliced down into the atmosphere of the great planet. They could make out great seas and continents now. For all its great size it seemed capable of supporting life. But for the shape of the seas and continents Blaine might have been approaching the surface of his own world.

Sound came to them now. Blaine could feel the rush of air as they descended toward the surface of the planet, and moments later they could make out a gleaming, vast city set between two jagged mountains in a verdant valley. Even as he looked at it and heard the men beside him exclaim, the visiscreen lit up.

He saw a beautiful face upon it. The face of the woman he had seen in the globe! Her eyes were mocking, laughing, taunting him. He reached savagely for the control to turn off the screen, but at the same time he saw the woman's hand touch a dial.

And from the city a bright purple lancet of light reached up into the sky and enveloped the ship.

Blaine felt a numbing shock. The air of the ship seemed to heat up and a loud hum lashed at his ears. Then his senses began to whirl and the numbness increased. He heard Carter cry out in fear.

Then darkness swept over him in a swirling roar.

BLAINe came to with the feeling that a million needles were tearing at his body. He gradually became aware that it was the return of feeling to his numbed nerves. His eyes prickled with little daggers of pain as his sight cleared. The first thing he saw was a long expanse of metallic flooring. He then became aware that his cheek was pressed against the cold

surface of the metal. The floor seemed to spread for blocks. But close to him his vision was obscured by a line of boot-clad feet. He raised his eyes and gazed upon a row of strangely clad guards, each man holding a silver-barreled weapon.

As his strength came back he was aware that somebody had just pulled a hypodermic needle from his arm. The jab of pain as the needle left him brought him to his knees.

"So you finally came out of the parala-ray, Blaine."

The voice and the words registered on his ears. He knew somehow that the voice was familiar. He lifted himself to his feet then and swayed for a moment while his vision steadied.

He looked into the face of Frank Fallenger not five feet away.

"Frank! My God, where am I?"

Fallenger's face was impassive. Only then did Blaine note that the man's clothing had changed. He was wearing a close-fitting metallic garment and a slash of color ran diagonally across his chest. A short ceremonial sword was held in a short scabbard at his waist. His feet, too, were booted like those in the line of guards behind him. But in his hand he held only the empty hypo.

"No, Blaine, you are not mad. But neither are you on Luna or Earth. You have been brought to Thallom...."

"Thallom? Frank, this is impossible—what are you doing here?"

Fallenger's features inclined to something behind Blaine. His voice was reverent as he intoned: "I adopted the name of Fallenger only to be among your kind, Earthman. I am Tagath, adviser to the Queen Lura, ruler of all Thallom."

Blaine, his mind spinning at the man's words, turned slowly.

He was facing a throne. He stood at the base of a tier of steps leading up to it. Seated upon an emerald-

studded chair of state was the woman of the globe. She was clad in a rich gown, cut low on breasts that rose and fell in supple, sensual movements. Her rich golden hair was held in place by a diamond tiara and her bare arms rested on the arms of the throne. Her eyes were fastened steadily upon him, and there was no emotion in them. She seemed to be studying him, weighing him.

"So this is the famed Earth Captain, Rex Blaine." There was a note of contempt in her words that brought a flush to Blaine's face.

"And you are Lura, Queen of Thallom. What have you done to my men?"

The full lips of Lura parted in an amused smile. "The Captain's crew is quite well taken care of. He need not concern himself with their safety—only his own."

The threat in her words was not veiled and Blaine's lips curled. "It is easy to threaten a man who stands before you weaponless. The Queen Lura shows great courage."

Her cheeks flamed at his words and he heard the mutter of anger from the guards behind him.

FALLENDER suddenly moved up beside him. There was cold anger on the man's features. "Watch your tongue, Blaine. If I had my way you'd be burned to a crisp just as Masters was."

"Masters?" Blaine felt a hot anger sear him. "What have you done to him?"

Fallenger sneered openly. "He is dead. Just as you will be, shortly."

Lura spoke sharply from her throne. "Hold your tongue, Tagath. I will decide who will die and when!"

Blaine turned back to her. "I demand to know why I am brought here. And what is this traitor Earthman, Fallenger, doing here?"

Lura smiled slowly. "You heard

Tagath, Rex Blaine. He is not an Earthman. He is of Thallom. I sent him to Earth. I have learned much of your planet from him. My plans are now nearly complete, my laboratories freshly stocked with the best of your technical minds. My space armada awaits the signal to flash down upon your world in conquest. It is time, as soon your race might learn the secret of the wall in space.

"Tagath would have me kill you. And perhaps his is the wise choice. But I have a use for you and can promise much in return. You are a space captain. I need trained men to fly my armada. Many of your Earthmen are already indoctrinated to the wonders of Thallom. They who tried to reach the stars were met just as you were. They now serve Lura. I give you your choice. Serve me along with them or—"

She left the words hanging, but Blaine did not need a further explanation.

"You have your answer!" he snapped. "The only service I'll give you is the same you gave John Masters! And I'll live to see this traitor to Earth, here, pay for his treason!"

"Brave words, Earthman. But let us not talk of hate. We have not shown you how we can welcome men to Thallom." Lura's tone changed abruptly to one of soft invitation. She clapped her hands sharply.

Blaine frowned but continued to glare at her. Then from behind the throne a door opened and a line of girls entered. Each carried a silver tray upon which stood a flask and filled glass. The glasses contained a dark amber fluid. One of them stopped before Lura and knelt. Another walked down and bent one knee toward Tagath. A third came slowly toward Blaine.

He stared at her. She wore a simple two-piece garment, blouse and slit skirt. As she approached a gleam-

ing white thigh showed in the break of the skirt. Her hair was dark and full and rich. But it was her face that held Blaine. It was soft and smooth and held a quiet dignity that he did not expect to find in the features of a slave girl. Her eyes were a deep blue and they held his for a moment before she bowed her head slightly before him, raising the tray.

Blaine hesitated. He saw that Lura and Tagath had both taken glasses and were waiting expectantly for him. Slowly he reached out and took his glass from the tray. He saw Lura raise hers in a toast; was aware that Tagath was watching him tensely. And a warning bell rang somewhere in Blaine's mind.

The slave girl was looking at him again and starting to back away. His eyes caught and held hers and he saw a pleading look in them. One of fear and warning. And almost imperceptibly he saw her lips move. He barely caught the whispered word: "Drugged!" and she had backed away.

Blaine stiffened. His eyes shot over to Tagath. The man he had known as Fallenger was staring in wrath at the slave girl. Tagath tore his eyes from her and glared at Blaine.

"Well, Blaine, the queen Lura waits upon you!"

With a deliberate movement Blaine dropped the glass to the metal floor. There was the clink of broken glass and the amber liquid spilled out.

"I don't like my drinks drugged!" Blaine snapped.

As the words left his lips he heard the swift intake of breath from the slave girl, and he knew instant regret. For by them he had exposed the girl who had risked her life to warn him.

Tagath turned wrathfully upon her. His arm lashed out and caught her full across the face. Her head snapped back under the force of the blow and

she fell to the floor. "You will die for your treason, Noreen!"

Tagath lashed out with his foot and as his boot neared the cowering body of the girl, Blaine acted.

He lunged forward and caught Tagath off-balance. The force of his body carried the man backward, to crash to the floor at the feet of the shouting guards. Blaine twisted away from the fallen man and caught the leg of the closest guard. He wrenched sharply and the man screamed as he fell upon Tagath.

THEN BLAINE was on his feet. He saw the nearest guard frantically trying to bring his weapon to bear on him, but before the man could aim Blaine sent a fist smashing into his mouth. The man rocked backward as Tagath regained his feet.

He smashed into Tagath, sending him reeling with a hard kick to his groin. Tagath let out a bellow of pain and screamed, "Guards! Kill him!"

But Blaine was not an easy target. He swung around and dove headlong at the next man rushing in. The guard did not expect the sudden attack and sprawled, carrying Blaine with him. Then as he fought to regain his feet Blaine heard a shrill command from the throne.

"Don't kill him! I want him alive!"

Blaine laughed harshly and grabbed for the silver weapon the man beneath him held. His fingers closed around the weapon and he wrenched it free. Hope sprang in Blaine now. If he could use it fast enough...

He rolled free of the fallen guard and felt swiftly for the operating mechanism of the weapon. His finger closed around a snub trigger. But even as he aimed at the rushing group of guards still on their feet, he knew he was too late.

A half dozen lances of bright yellow light spat out at him, caught his

body. He heard the slave girl scream in fear and in a brief flash saw one of the guards smashing the butt of his weapon at the girl.

It was the last thing he saw. His body shrieked in protest against the rays that tore into it. A paralysis gripped him and he dropped his own weapon. Then merciful darkness closed over him and he fell as from a great height....

AWARENESS came back to Blaine with the tingling of a myriad needles in his brain. His body protested against the return to life of its nerves, and he felt the blood pound in his veins.

Then, strangely, he felt a soothing coolness sweep across his brow. With it the painful return to consciousness seemed to ease. His eyes flickered open and he tried to focus his gaze.

Again the coolness caressed his brow and he saw suddenly that it was a hand resting lightly on his forehead. Alarm coursed through him at the cool touch and he tried to force his weakened muscles to respond. Then a soft voice reached his ears.

"You fought bravely, Earthman. The Targal, my father himself, would not have made a more noble effort."

Blaine looked into the face of the beautiful slave girl whom Fallenger had called Noreen. Her fingers continued to caress his brow and he lay unmoving under the pleasant contact of her flesh to his. Then her eyes met his and her hand left his forehead. A flush covered her face, matching the red welt that Fallenger's blow had left upon her right cheek.

"...You are awakened."

Blaine sat up slowly, staring about him. He was lying on a simple cot of straw with a blanket as the only covering. The walls were a cold and ugly limestone and there was no window. Across from where he sat a metal door provided the only opening to the

room. It was closed. But for the small barred window-opening set high in the door, there would have been no illumination. Soft yellow light streamed into the cell from somewhere outside.

"Where are we, Noreen?" Blaine uttered her name and glanced again at the girl. She had moved away from the cot, and the flush still remained on her cheeks.

"We are beneath the palace of Lura, in the dungeons. Tagath himself brought us here."

"Tagath..." Blaine breathed the name as if it were a curse. And then the full realization of what had happened came back to his mind. He looked at the girl with pity in his eyes. "I am sorry, Noreen. I betrayed you when you tried to help me. I would gladly have taken the drug, whatever it was, to have saved you from this...."

Her eyes glowed with silent thanks at his words. "I am glad I tried to help you, Rex Blaine. I knew you were brave and honest from the moment I saw them take you from your ship and into Lura's palace. I vowed then I would try to help you, just as I tried to aid your brother Earthman, John Masters. I failed as well with him.... I am sorry."

Blaine stiffened at mention of Masters' name. "You knew Masters? Tell me—"

The girl shrugged her slim bare shoulders hopelessly. "I helped Masters escape the robot-labs. I stole the tele-globe and gave it to Masters. He was to return to your planet and warn your people of Lura's evil plans in this solar system. But Masters was discovered before he could use the transmuting powers of the globe. Tagath's men burned him terribly before he could escape. I thought even then he had succeeded. But Lura brought him back...and you know what happened to him...."

Blaine nodded dully. Yes, he knew

what had happened to Masters, and his lips grew grim at the thought. But there were so many things he didn't understand. So many things he had to know.

"What is this evil plan you speak of, Noreen? And what do you mean when you say 'this solar system'?"

THE GIRL folded her hands in her lap as she knelt on the stone floor beside Blaine. Her sweet features became set in a hard cast as she replied.

"Our planet, Thallom, is no child of your sun-star, Sol. We have traveled many billions of miles from the dead star of our own system. The rulers of Thallom foresaw the death of our own sun and they wisely provided for it. We could have migrated to another world, it is true. But Thallom is a great planet, capable of supporting life as we knew and loved it. So our scientists perfected the negative energy drive and moved our planet out into space.

"For countless generations we have traveled through the void thus, stopping in a solar system only long enough to recharge our reservoirs with energy from some uninhabitable world, such as your planet Saturn is in this system. Right now we are drawing tremendous stores of negative energy from that barren world."

Blaine nodded in amazement as he remembered the way Saturn had glowed as they approached it. He listened again as the girl continued to speak, but this time her voice held bitterness and regret.

"Through all these years upon years our people never once usurped from another race anything that belonged to them. We came and went as quickly as we could, pausing only to restock our source of power. But then came Lura and Tagath. They caused a revolt among our people and took over the government, proclaiming themselves as head. Under Lura's rule,

which she holds through control of the Sacred Robots of Law, all of Thallom is in virtual slavery, although our people do not realize it. They do her bidding because they think it is the Law of our Ancients, guarded and proclaimed by the Sacred Robot who has been entrusted with its keeping. But the Great Book of Law has been changed. Lura and Tagath have inserted a page that our Ancients never would have sanctioned.

"The Law is our religion and we abide by it faithfully and without question. It teaches benevolence and kindness and friendship to all living things. But not the law of Lura and Tagath. It tells only of conquest and power and the superiority of Thallom over all worlds."

Her voice paused in its bitter narration, and Blaine frowned. "But how can the changing of a page in a book make your people respect this false law, Noreen?"

The girl sighed. "In all our cities on Thallom, in every home, in every place where our people meet, there are telescreens that are never turned off. On these screens the law is projected from the Chamber of the Sacred Robot deep within this palace. Our people do not know that the law has been changed by Lura and Tagath. They think it is but the wish and wisdom of our Ancients. They follow it and bow to Lura's will."

"But, Noreen, is there no way to change the law and show your people how Lura and Tagath have usurped the rule of Thallom?"

The girl shook her head slowly. "The only way is to gain entrance to the Sacred Chamber and destroy the false law Lura and Tagath created. But that is impossible because no man is allowed in the Chamber. The Sacred Robot would slay anyone who tried to enter."

"But you told me that Lura and Tagath had entered and changed the

Law," Blaine insisted.

"That is true," the girl replied, "but they turned off its power from deep within Thallom. The Robot is part of the energy field that drives our planet. They took control of the energy field and then entered the Sacred Chamber. When they left, the Law had been changed. The Robot continues to guard it."

Blaine reached down and lifted the girl from the floor and motioned her to sit beside him on the cot. She did so. He took her hand and held it firmly in his.

"Tell me now, Noreen, why is it that Lura and Tagath prey upon our solar system? And what is this wall in space that hides your world from ours?"

THE GIRL'S eyes showed a weary anger. "That is the terrible price my people have had to pay for Lura and Tagath's treachery, Rex Blaine. For Tagath tampered with the energy fields to produce the invisible wall of negative forces that now gird your system. This happened when I was but a child. Tagath sought to create a weapon out of the wonderful creation of our ancients that allowed Thallom to move through space as if it were a ship instead of a great planet. And Tagath succeeded. But the men of Thallom have paid a great price for his success. We do not know what complex forces are utilized in the Power Tunnels that run inside our world, but Tagath's tampering with them had caused a change in the structure of our males.

"Men of Thallom can no longer reproduce. The genes of their bodies have been altered by the negative energies Tagath unleashed in the short space of a few years. Lura and Tagath realize this, although our people as yet do not know the full consequences. Thus it is that Lura and Tagath prey upon your planet. They will steal the

strongest, the most brilliant of your males to labor in our robot-labs where they are drugged to do the bidding of Lura and Tagath unquestioningly. Their minds will be utilized for the science and knowledge they possess, and their bodies to restock the population of Thallom with the will-less robot humans...just as your two crew members even now labor in the techno-labs...."

Blaine sat stunned by the horror of what the girl unfolded. "You mean that Kline and Carter are drugged, helpless...?"

She nodded. "Even as you will be, unless Tagath has convinced Lura that you must die. I do no know. For some reason she seems attracted to you..." "I would sooner die than have that devil-bitch make use of me!" Blaine swore harshly. He got to his feet and stared down at the girl. "But how do you, a slave girl, know all this, and why should you choose to fight against the power of Lura and Tagath?"

Noreen rose slowly from the cot and stood before him. Her breasts rose and fell in rapid emotion and the blouse she wore grew taut against their swell. Her head was raised proudly, and once again, as he had noted when she approached earlier bearing the tray and drugged drink, there was a dignity about her that no slave bearing could erase. Her eyes flashed now and her voice held a proud ring.

"The former ruler of Thallom was a great Targal. It was he whom Lura and Tagath slew to usurp command of my people. The Targal who was rightful head of Thallom by his birth-right. When they slew the Targal they also killed my father, for they were one and the same."

Blaine stared hard at her. "Then you are the rightful ruler of Thallom?" he asked incredulously.

"I am. And that is why Lura allows me to live. It gives her sadistic pleasure to have me as a slave to her,

knowing full well that I am the destined ruler of Thallom." The fire faded abruptly from her eyes and her shoulders sagged despondently. "But now she knows I have acted openly against her, and even her sadistic nature will succumb to the anger she feels. I have been condemned to die."

Blaine clenched his fists in angry frustration. "But you are not yet dead, Noreen. Nor am I a will-less slave to Lura. We will fight together!"

Hope sprang into the girl's eyes and she stepped close to Blaine. He felt the nearness of her, the soft fragrance of her body next to his.

"If I could believe there was the slightest chance, Rex Blaine! I would gladly give my life to wrest Thallom from the evil that grips it and save your own planet from the invasion Tagath plans!"

Blaine gripped the girl's shoulders in his hands. "What invasion, Noreen?"

"Even now Tagath prepares the space armada for attack against your Earth. He and Lura feel it is dangerous to steal one by one the strong males they need. They reason that soon your people will discover the wall and build a defense against invasion, even as you discovered it. When that armada leaves I am to die..."

Her face was close to his, her breath warm and sweet upon his cheek. Blaine felt the blood pounding within him and his arms swept suddenly around her and his lips caught hers.

For a moment she stiffened in his arms. Then her warm body lay pressed against him and her lips responded to his. He could feel the rapid pulsing of her breast against him and he was swept away in an emotion he had never known before.

But as suddenly as their embrace began, she pushed him away from her. There was alarm in her eyes as she whispered: "Listen! Someone is coming!"

BLAINE TURNED his head toward the door and heard the sound of booted feet on metal. He stiffened.

Noreen left his arms and her fingers moved swiftly to the blouse she wore. She removed something from within it and whispered urgently.

"Here, Rex Blaine, take this! I know not what Lura plans for you but this will help you to resist her. Take it quickly—swallow it—it is the only thing I can do to help you...."

Blaine stared at the small white capsule she thrust at him. Then he heard the booted feet stop outside the cell door and the jangle of a key in the lock. Without a word he took the capsule and put it in his mouth. It dissolved almost instantly and he tasted a bitter-sweet substance. He swallowed, and almost at once the taste vanished from his mouth. He stepped away from the girl and whispered as the door of the cell opened: "I will remember all you have said, Noreen. And I will fight for your people and mine—and you..."

He saw the gratitude in her eyes, and also the hopeless sadness there. Then he turned to the door.

Two guards stood in the opening, parala-rays in their hands.

"You, Earthman, come with us."

"Where?" Blaine snapped.

The guard menaced him with the weapon. "Yours is not to question the orders of Queen Lura. Come!"

Blaine hesitated for a moment, but saw it would be useless to try anything with those paralysis guns trained on him. He had no desire to feel their stinging numbness again. Without looking back at the girl he strode from the cell.

The guards stepped back as he came through the door. One of them slammed it shut, turned the key in the lock, withdrew it and placed it in a recessed opening in the wall away

from the door. Then he motioned to Blaine with the parala-ray. "Walk before us. And do not try anything."

Blaine nodded and walked slowly along the metal passage. It sloped upward and they came to a turn. He rounded it and felt the guards close at his back. The passageway stretched far ahead here and he continued to move along it. Finally one of the guards ordered: "Stop here."

Blaine stopped walking. The guard stepped around him and depressed a glowing knob in one wall of the passage. Soundlessly a partition slid back, revealing a small chamber. "Inside," the guard ordered.

He stepped inside and they followed him. The panel slid back in place and one of them stepped to a wall control. Blaine noted that a series of numerals were set in a dial indicating various levels. The indicator pointed to the seventh as the elevator was set in operation. He watched the needle rise rapidly to the top level, thirty. The mechanism of the elevator was soundless and he only had an indication of their speed by the draining of blood toward his feet. He guessed that a level was greater than an Earth floor would have been, and knew they must have come from deep beneath the palace proper.

The elevator stopped and one of the guards pressed a release catch. Soundlessly a panel slid aside. The guards motioned him from the elevator.

Blaine stepped into a room that was at once familiar to him. Instantly he recognized it as the room he had seen first in the globe Masters had held back on Luna. The thought made his mind whirl. That had been such a short time ago, and yet now it seemed that years had sped by in the interim. Luna seemed almost a nebulous dream, and Earth along with it.

And then he saw her.

She reclined on a long low couch

across the room, her eyes closed, seemingly asleep.

BLAINE'S BLOOD raced in spite of his hatred for her. She was clad in a diaphanous gown, and the swell of her breasts was tantalizing against the sheer material that held them in restraint. Her hair was long and free now, resting luxuriously against her bared shoulders. She was beautiful and desirable. Instinctively he knew she had planned it this way.

Almost in answer to his thoughts her eyes opened. She saw him standing across the room and her green eyes flashed in mock amusement.

"So the Earthman stares at the Queen of Thallom while she slumbers."

Blaine's eyes were cold. "You know as well as I do that you were not asleep. You ordered me brought here and assumed that pose on the couch. Very touching, Lura, but I'm not impressed."

For an instant anger flashed from her eyes. Then the slow smile returned to her lips. "The Earthman still shows bravery. Or is it really only a stubborn foolishness? Perhaps you too try to impress, Rex Blaine."

"I don't use guns or guards or threats," Blaine retorted.

She arched her eyebrows and slid one long gleaming leg from the couch to the floor. "So? And would you give me your word that you would not try to escape if I told my guards to leave?"

"I would not."

She rose slowly from the couch, her gown concealing now the slim length of soft thigh. "Perhaps you are afraid to be alone with me, Rex Blaine?"

His eyes remained set on hers unflinching. "I would not be afraid, Queen Lura. But perhaps you would be. I am not one of your puppets, to be made to dance at your every wish. Your throat is slender and lovely, but would you trust it in my hands?"

Her face reddened under the mockery of his words. For an instant anger shone in her eyes. "Your stubbornness begins to irk me, Earthman. Know you that were it not for me you would be dead even now. Tagath lusts for your blood."

"And you, Queen Lura?"

"I—" the rise and fall of her breasts quickened in tempo—"offer you life and happiness."

Blaine smiled thinly. "As a male concubine, my queen?" His words lashed her. "Would you have me beget you an heir to your tyranny? Has even Tagath lost his manhood as these puppet guards of yours?"

Her features turned livid with wrath. "You have been listening to that slave girl! Her lies—"

"You mean to Queen Noreen, rightful ruler of Thallom?" Blaine snapped.

"I said slave!" Her voice rose heatedly, then dropped to a cunning tone. "Or perhaps you would prefer the arms of a slave to a queen, Earthman?"

"I could know true love with her. The touch of *your* body would fill me with loathing."

Lura's lips trembled with rage. Her hand flew to a small weapon fastened at her slender waist. "Beware, Earthman, I have killed men for saying not a tenth as much. Do not take advantage of my charity in keeping you alive."

"Charity?" Blaine used the word as a curse. "Such as you showed John Masters? Or my crew who even now slave in your puppet labs? As you have shown your own people by usurping their leadership and defiling the Law of the Ancients?"

Her hand closed over the weapon again and her features paled. "You first intrigued me when I saw you through the tele-globe, Earthman. I value strength highly. And when you attacked Tagath and my guards, I felt that you could be very useful to

me and Thallom. You are a brave man. But you are also very rash. Listen to me closely, for this is the only time I will tell you.

"I offer you an honored place in my command. With me you can see a universe open to our plunder. I can offer you much more...." Her tone grew soft and inviting, her eyes slightly veiled. She moved slowly from the couch toward him and her leg slipped through the slit gown, showing pale and white to the breach of her thigh.

BLAINE STILLED the harsh words that rose to his lips. He hesitated. "And what of Noreen? And my men Kline and Carter? And the other Earthmen you hold imprisoned here?"

She shook her head slowly. "That will be the test of your fealty, Rex Blaine. The slave girl dies and your Earthmen remain in the labs of Thallom to serve the purposes their knowledge and man-strength will provide."

Blaine's lips tightened and his eyes flashed at her. "Then take that weapon from your waist, Queen Lura. The only fealty you will get from me is death!"

She threw back her head suddenly and laughed. The sound of it chilled Blaine. Then she looked at him and there was no longer the invitation in her eyes or voice. "That would be too easy, Earthman. I shall not kill you. No, I will see you grovel at my feet. You will pay for the things you have said—after you answer to my every whim and desire!"

Blaine became aware in that moment that he had pushed her too far. He watched her hand leave the weapon at her waist and she motioned to the guards behind him. He glanced over his shoulder and saw their faces remain stoic, but the weapons they held were trained steadily upon him.

Lura walked over to a cabinet-like desk and opened a drawer. He saw her take a metal case from it. She opened

it on the desk top and her voice held a grim laughter.

"You evaded taking the drug of obedience from the hands of Noreen, Earthman. Now you shall feel its numbing power! Then we shall see what you will refuse to do in my service!"

She opened a small bottle of colorless fluid and inserted the needle of a hypodermic into it. He watched as she pulled the plunger back and the fluid filled the syringe. His blood chilled for he knew what this meant.

She stepped away from the cabinet desk and stared at him. "Relish your last few moments of free will, Earthman. So that you will know the complete power of the drug I shall show you what is in store for you should I so desire it."

Holding the hypodermic syringe she walked over to the great telescreen on the far side of the room. She flicked a switch on the machine and the screen flared into life.

Blaine stared at it, fascinated. He saw the screen clear into its three-dimensional focus and he was staring into a huge laboratory. It seemed to spread for miles. There were row upon row of work benches, assembly lines, and tiers of complicated machinery and chemical apparatus. At the head of each line a uniformed guard walked slowly down the line, a long whip in his hand. Huddled over the benches and assembly lines were hundreds of men. Their faces were expressionless, stony, their eyes seemingly vacant of life. Only their hands moved, performing the myriad tasks to which they had been assigned. Whenever the guards thought they were not moving fast enough the long whip would snake out and snap into the back of the worker. He saw the bodies of the men stiffen under the cruel lash, even while their features remained impas-sive. But under the bite of the lash

their fingers worked more swiftly.

Lura narrowed the field of the scene and Blaine's breath caught in his throat. "Ned! George!" The names sped from his lips. He saw the radio man and the master technician side by side before a complicated mechanism of spiraling helixes and tubes.

"Yes, Rex Blaine, see how your comrades struggle with the intricacies of a sub-atomic converter. See their faces! See in them the same expression that will soon be yours!"

AS BLAINE watched he saw one of the guards step up to the two men and lash out with his whip. He saw Ned Kline stiffen under the cruel blow but his features remained impassive. His eyes vacantly staring, seeing nothing but the machinery under his swiftly moving hands.

Then Lura had turned a switch on the screen and another scene took its place there.

"You saw what is happening on the tenth level, Earthman. Now see how others of your Earthmen serve me and Thallom!"

Blaine saw—and what he saw made his face blanch. A huge medical laboratory spread on the screen. He saw row upon row of white metal tables with Earthmen lying prone upon them. White-coated guards and Thallom attendants supervised the extraction of life-force from the immobile victims. And as the scene switched again he saw the great spawning chambers where the life-force of Earth was combined with that of Thallom. Farther along the great stretch of laboratories, he saw the incubators and finally the result—vacant, staring children. Pup-pets. Living robot flesh to feed the armadas of Lura and Tagath under forced development. The children placed in energy machines. Great whirling flashes of light playing across their tiny frames. And they grew. Fast-

er than a weed under the nourishing of a sun-lamp. They advanced, grew to adulthood.

At the far far end he saw them leave the laboratories, uniformed in the service of Thallom.

As sick as all this made Blaine, he knew it was not really Thallom. It was the evil power of Lura and Tagath that wrought such sacrilege against the sanctity of life and liberty.

Lura turned off the machine. The screen went black.

"You will remember what you have seen, Earthman. Let it haunt you from this moment on."

She came toward him, the hypodermic in her hand.

Blaine tensed himself. He knew it would be better to die than become a soulless slave to this woman.

But even as he prepared to move, she seemed to sense his purpose. She motioned to one of the guards, who came swiftly around Blaine and stood before her. She took the parala-ray from him and levelled it at Blaine.

"This will only be a light shock, Earthman. It will last but a few moments. Enough to give you the injection.

Before Blaine could act she had forced the weapon. A bright flash of radiance enveloped him and he felt his muscles freeze.

Only his eyes seemed capable of response. He saw her motion the guards to leave and they turned from his line of vision. Then she placed the weapon down on the cabinet and approached him. Her face was smiling, confident.

Blaine felt her loosen the sleeve of his shirt. Then suddenly he felt the pressure of the needle jabbing into him. No pain, his muscles seemed incapable of it. He watched her drive the plunger home and the fluid entered his body. Slowly she withdrew the syringe and stepped back.

"The parala-ray will subside in a moment, Earthman."

She was right. Blaine felt life flood back into his body. He ground out a harsh curse and stepped toward her, his fingers reaching for her throat.

But he never completed the action. His hands stayed in mid-air where he had directed them, but somehow his mind failed to send the thought-pattern to his nerves. He stood like a statue, mentally forcing his body to respond. It was useless. Even his brain seemed to grow numb. He was unable to think clearly. His subconscious mind dictated his mind to act, but it was as if his consciousness were being held by steel bonds.

Lura's laughter, mocking and evil, rang out.

"Why don't you complete your plan, Rex Blaine? You think you are incapable of movement? Watch." She moved back toward the low couch and stood there. "Come here, Earthman. Stand before me."

The order registered somehow on Blaine's conscious thought-pattern. He fought against it but knew that he would obey her. He saw himself walk over to stand in front of her. It was weird, as if he were a spectator outside his own body, yet knowing that he was part of it. That he wanted to do whatever she commanded.

"Now, Earthman, you wished to place your hands around my throat. You may do so."

Blaine lifted his hands and placed them around her slender pulsing throat. The contact of her flesh with his was electric. Deep within his subconscious he wished to tighten those fingers, to crush the life from her body. But his conscious mind, attuned to her eyes, her beauty, her sensual being, refused.

Her voice grew passionate, inviting. "You have me in your arms, Earthman. What would you have me do—

offer myself to you?"

And Blaine replied, "If it is my Queen Lura's wish it is my desire."

"...It is my wish, Rex Blaine."

She sank slowly upon the couch, her gown falling away from her smooth thigh. Blaine sank beside her, his pulse pounding, unable to resist the nearness of her. His arms folded her against him and her lips sought his hungrily, open, her breath searching his in a passionate kiss.

Blaine's subconscious rebelled. He screamed against his conscious mind, sought to break down the barrier that held him from control of his will.

Suddenly he felt the barrier crumbling, the sudden surge of his own ego through the drugged command she held on him.

His hands were caressing her and she trembled against him, her breath hot on his face, her eyes veiled and dreamy. "...See, Earthman, what I can offer you...what I need from your strength...."

"So this is why you wanted the Earthman kept alive!"

BLAINe felt a rough hand grasp his shoulder and he was torn from the embrace of Lura. He was pulled up and away from the couch and thrown backward. His body hit the floor and he rolled painfully, unable to control his muscles properly to recover.

When he finally regained his feet he swayed there drunkenly, his body seemingly without purpose or will to act.

He saw Tagath standing beside the couch where the queen Lura was on her feet now, her features a mask of seething rage.

Her voice was shrill. "How *dare* you invade my quarters like this!"

Tagath took a step backward and pointed at Blaine. "I suspected that your interest in this Earthman was

more than a casual one! I told you before that he should die—now I will see to it myself!"

Lura's face was livid. "You will see to it! Take care, Tagath, you go too far! Your jealousy is flattering, but I will choose whom I love!"

Tagath did not flinch before her. Instead he drew a weapon from his belt and held it menacingly. "Perhaps I am jealous of the Earthman—but I also know that he is a dangerous man. I will not stand by and watch you risk our success in this system because of an impetuous romance!"

Lura laughed then. "Dangerous? You are a fool, Tagath! The Earthman is even now under the obedience drug. He has no will of his own! I tell you once and for all, leave my chambers and perhaps I will forget your treason..."

Tagath's eyes were cold upon hers. "You are not in a position to order me as a slave, Lura. Without me you are not queen of Thallom, and you know it. I have made up my mind. The Earthman dies, now!"

He turned swiftly toward Blaine, the weapon raised.

Blaine saw the weapon point at him. And he knew that in a moment a lethal ray would sear the life from his body. He willed himself to move, and almost his consciousness responded. But not quickly enough.

Tagath fired at that moment.

The ray lashed out, missing Blaine by inches. It was Lura who had deflected Tagath's aim. The queen lashed at him in fury, throwing him off balance.

At the same instant Blaine felt the numbing power of the drug leave him. It happened in a split second of time and he was aware of a return of power to his body. He leaped forward, his body streaking through the air in a flying tackle at Tagath's knees.

Even as he leapt he knew what had happened. The capsule Noreen had given him. She had said it would help him resist Lura. It had been an antidote for the obedience drug!

He hit Tagath then, and they toppled to the floor. The force of the collision had thrown Lura aside and she crashed against the couch.

Blaine regained his feet as Tagath rolled away, kicking desperately. Blaine saw that he still held the gun, and he knew that the next blast would not miss him. He came down on top of Tagath and smashed his fist into the man's mouth. He felt teeth crumble under the blow and then Tagath had brought his weapon to bear again.

Blaine lashed out savagely and deflected Tagath's arm as the weapon discharged. The blast exploded into the cabinet near them and the piece of furniture split in two smoking fragments and crashed to the floor.

Something landed beside Blaine. He saw that it was the parala-ray Lura had used on him. Desperately his fingers reached out and closed around the weapon. Beneath him, Tagath twisted sideways and savagely. Blaine felt the man's boot thud into his stomach, driving the wind from him. Then Tagath brought his weapon up again.

But Blaine acted first. The parala-ray spat a numbing ray into Tagath, and the man stiffened and moved no more.

Blaine heard a shrill cry of hate from Lura at that moment. The queen had regained her feet and was swaying in front of the couch. Her face was a mask of rage and she held a weapon in her hand now.

"You tricked me, Earthman! The drug had no effect on you! Tagath is right—you are too dangerous a man to live!"

But his parala-gun fired ahead of her. He saw the ray slash into her,

watched the shocked surprise on her lips, saw her stiffen, totter for a moment on her feet, and then fall unconscious to the floor.

BLAINE got to his feet, breathing hard. He looked down at the two rulers of Thallom. Deliberately he aimed the parala-ray at them again and fired another numbing charge into their unconscious forms. His lips were grim. He knew he should have killed them both where they lay. Yet he hesitated. There was Noreen to think of first, and the enslaved Earthmen in the labs. He listened for a moment, but heard no sound from the guards outside. He made his decision. Lura and Tagath would remain unconscious, as he himself had. Long enough at least to free Noreen, and then...

Blaine put the parala-ray in his belt and lifted Tagath's death-ray weapon from the floor. He turned then and hurried across the room to where the hidden elevator was.

The wall seemed a single section, but he saw the knob projecting from it at the spot he had entered the room. He pushed on it. Soundlessly a panel slid back and the elevator was open.

He entered quickly and set the indicator for the seventh level. The panel slid shut and he felt himself dropping, swiftly, silently.

When the indicator rested at the seventh level, the panel slid aside and he hurried out into the metal corridor. He ran swiftly, following the now down-sloping passage, around a turn, and in sight of the cell where he had left Noreen.

Alarm raced through him as he came to a sudden stop.

The door of Noreen's cell was open and she was being led from it by three guards. Tagath's men! The Earth traitor was wasting no time in seeing that the girl was executed!

Almost as the thought flashed through Blaine's mind, the guards saw him. They let out a shout of alarm and reached for their weapons.

Blaine sprang forward, his own gun raised. He shouted at the open-mouthed girl. "Into the cell! Quickly, Noreen!"

He saw the girl break away from the guard who held her, and Blaine fired. His first blast caught the foremost guard a glancing blow and the man spun on his feet, a cry of pain escaping his lips as smoke tinged the air from his charred clothing. Then he fell to the floor of the corridor.

Blaine was close upon the remaining two guards then. But they had their weapons out and one of them fired. Blaine threw himself to the floor and the sizzling heat ray cut the air over his head. He fired as he fell.

His ray slashed home and the man became a smoking hulk swaying on his feet. The last of the guards aimed deliberately then, and Blaine knew all was lost. He steeled his body for the blast of the heat ray.

Something smashed into the guard as he fired. Blaine shouted in fear as he saw that it was Noreen. The girl had leapt from the entrance to the cell in time to deflect the weapon and save Blaine's life.

Blaine was on his feet in that brief second and the weapon in his hand lashed out a sizzling ray.

It caught the guard full in the face and choked off the cry of fear from his lips. He fell to the floor of the corridor, a smoking, charred corpse.

Blaine held Noreen close against him for a long moment, then pushed her gently away from him.

"Oh, Rex, you're free! But how—"

Blaine quieted her. "There's no time for explanations, Noreen. I left Tagath and Lura unconscious from

a dose of parala-rays in Lura's chambers."

"We must get there quickly then!" the girl said, sudden hope filling her eyes. "The effects of the ray will not last long...."

Blaine shook his head. "Not before we have freed my men. We need help, Noreen."

The girl stared at him puzzledly. "But they are under the obedience drug! They are of no use to us!"

Blaine nodded. "I know that. But you have an antidote for that drug!"

"That is true! I had forgotten! In all of the robot-labs there are supplies of the antidote—but the guards—"

Blaine took her arm. "We'll have to take that chance. My men are on the tenth level. Do you know the way?"

She nodded, and there was a fighting light in her eyes that made his blood race. "I know the way, Rex! Give me a gun to fight with—I will show the men of Lura how the daughter of a Targal punishes them for their treason!"

BLAINE reached down beside one of the dead guards and retrieved a weapon. He handed it to her. It seemed large in her tiny white hand, but there was grim purpose in the way she held it.

"Let us go quickly then!" she breathed. "We may yet have time to get back to Lura and Tagath!"

She led the way down the long corridor, in the opposite direction from which they had come. A moment later she paused uncertainly, then she indicated toward the opposite wall. "Here! An elevator will take us to the tenth level."

He watched as she manipulated a knob in the wall.

As the panel slid back Blaine stiffened in alarm. There were shouts in the corridor behind them and he could

see a group of Tagath's men rounding the far turn. Even as the guards saw them they began to fire.

Blaine pushed the girl into the elevator and felt the sizzling blast of a heat ray strike the metal panel. The metal grew red and fused. Then the girl had set the elevator in motion.

They shot upward, the indicator rising from seven to ten, then stopped, and the panel slid open.

They were standing at the entrance of a vast chamber. Blaine immediately recognized it as the great room he had seen on the screen in Lura's chambers. Row upon row of vast machines and assembly lines stretched ahead of them and the air was filled with the loud hum of machinery.

Blaine's eyes swept the great chamber, over the swiftly working Earthman slaves. Their eyes were intent only upon the task they worked upon, and the guards walked up and down each line, lashing out to speed up those who seemed too slow.

Noreen pointed to an enclosed cubicle a short distance away. "That is the control center. There will be supplies of the antidote in there!"

Blaine nodded and ran toward it, the girl following him. He heard a shout of alarm go up as they neared the control room, and saw some of the guards leave the robot lines, dropping their whips and reaching for guns at their belts.

Then they had reached the cubicle. The girl dashed inside and Blaine stood in the entrance, his heat gun raised.

Two guards came around a massive metal pillar, weapons drawn. Blaine took careful aim and fired. The guards ran straight into the sizzling beam of Blaine's weapon. They died on their feet, their charred bodies skidding to the metal floor.

Then Noreen was back again. She held a small plastic case, the lid open.

He saw it was filled with small white capsules.

"The antidote!" the girl said breathlessly. "But we must hurry—the alarm has sounded now!"

As she spoke Blaine heard the insistent clangor of a bell rise over the hum of machinery. He reached over and grabbed a handful of the capsules, then motioned for the girl to stand behind him.

Swiftly then he dashed across the open space toward the first line of robot-men. As he approached, two more guards swung around the far end of the line and fired.

Blaine dropped to one knee and pressed the trigger of his own weapon. The long thin line of burning ray slashed out, caught one of the guards, burned him before he could fire again. The other guard let out a cry of fear and dashed back around the corner of the line out of range of Blaine's fire.

Behind him, Blaine saw that the girl was already going from one to another of the robot-men, forcing capsules into their unresisting mouths.

Then Blaine saw his two crew members. They were in the next aisle, busily working at the helix tubes he had seen on Lura's screen. The noise and furor of the fighting seemed not to affect them or any of the other drugged Earthmen.

"I'm going after my men!" Blaine shouted to the girl.

She nodded, her eyes flashing with excitement. "Don't worry about me, I can take care of myself, Rex Blaine!"

As she spoke Blaine saw her suddenly lift the gun she held and fire down the aisle. He wheeled and saw that two more guards had rounded the corner. The girl's ray caught one of them, and Blaine, cursing, ducked behind a corner of a machine and fired after her. His blast caught the second guard and the men fell.

Then he smiled grimly to the girl. "Thanks," he said. She motioned him away, and continued along the aisle.

BLAIN cut diagonally through the maze of machinery and on into the next aisle. He saw that he was close beside Kline and Carter. "George! Ned!" he called out sharply. But neither of the men turned their heads. They continued to work mechanically, their faces vacant of expression.

Blaine ran up to them, conscious at the same moment that the clangor of the alarm bells was now being supplemented by rising shouts. That could mean but one thing. A full contingent of Tagath's men would have been summoned. In a moment he would be overwhelmed. Even as he thought of it, he heard the sizzling blast of Noreen's gun in the next aisle.

Blaine leapt forward beside Carter and Kline. He shoved two capsules each into their mouths, saw them mechanically swallow. Then suddenly a burning blast bit into the machine at his side.

He returned their fire, saw two of Blaine dropped, hitting the floor of the aisle, his body half protected by the flank of the machine. He saw a group of Tagath's men running toward him, their weapons blazing. them go down in the withering heat of the ray. But more took their place. He knew he could not hold them off long now. He was outnumbered. And his mind shrieked the thought: *why didn't the antidote take effect!*

The guards had taken cover on either side of the aisle and were approaching in ones and twos toward him, firing as they came to keep him pinned down.

He heard another series of shouts go up nearby. But this time a new tone was in the voices. And his heart sang as he knew they were the voices

of Earthmen! The men in Noreen's aisle were being freed of the obedience drug! .

Suddenly he saw Kline and Carter turn from the machine, their faces filled with awareness.

"Rex! Keep firing! We'll take care of these bastards!"

It was Ned Kline shouting. And even as Kline swore, he and Carter jumped two of the surprised guards as they came running up. Blaine fired into the other men bringing up the rear, and cut a blazing swath in their ranks. Then he heard a thud and saw that Carter had knocked one of the guards down and seized his weapon.

The technician's gun slashed a blazing lane into the now chaotic ranks of the guards. The line broke as they tried desperately to make a retreat.

But suddenly there was firing at their rear and Blaine let out a shout as he saw that Earthmen were attacking from the far end of the aisle. Tagath's men were trapped.

With grim lips Blaine fired into the milling ranks of the guards. Carter and Kline moved beside him, adding their guns to the holocaust. Within moments the last guard had fallen.

Quickly Blaine turned to his men. "Here, Ned, George, take these and release as many Earthmen as you can!" He handed them some of the capsules he held in his free hand. They nodded grimly and dashed off along the aisle.

Blaine shouted to the freed Earthmen. "Hold the guards from these aisles! We're freeing the rest of the men!"

He heard their answering shouts and saw the lust for battle in their eyes. He knew what a grim experience these men had been through. Men who had been kidnapped from Earth, vanishing mysteriously from their homes and friends. This was their

would make the men of Tagath and Lura pay for the horror of robot slavery.

Blaine cut back through the machinery to the next aisle. He saw that most of the robot-men had already been freed of their drugged existence and were milling around Noreen. She came toward him excitedly.

"I have given the capsules to others to administer, Rex!" she said. "But we have no time to lose—we must get to Lura and Tagath now!"

Blaine nodded as Carter and Kline joined them. He motioned to the men. "Ned, you and George come with Noreen and me. The rest of you clean up this level. When you've finished here—start on the others. We've got the advantage of surprise yet—they won't know where we'll strike next!"

The faces of the Earthmen showed grim purpose as they nodded to Blaine's words. He turned and ran down the long aisle beside Noreen and his two crewmen.

Ahead of them their course was blocked by fierce fighting as the released Earthman formed a blockade of the front of the great chamber against the assault of the guards answering the alarm.

Noreen grabbed Blaine's arm. "We cannot go that way! But I know of another shaft close by!"

She led them through a maze of machinery and finally to the opposite side of the chamber. Blaine waited anxiously while she operated the control that released the wall panel. Finally it slid aside and they entered the car.

Moments later they were shooting up toward the level thirty.

THREE was only one guard in Lura's room when they entered it a few moments later. The man wheeled at the sound of their ap-

proach and tried to go for his weapon.

Blaine shouted at him. "Stand still!"

The guard hesitated, then saw it was useless to resist. Calmly he lowered his hand from the gun at his waist.

Blaine's eyes swept the room. And a chill alarm gripped him as he saw that neither Lura nor Tagath was there.

"They're gone!" Noreen said bitterly. "We were too late!"

Blaine stepped up to the guard. "Where are Lura and Tagath?" he asked.

The guard glared at him sullenly.

Blaine raised his weapon to a level with the man's chest. "I'll give you just ten seconds to answer."

The guard licked his lips nervously, stared at the gun and then at Blaine's relentless eyes. Finally he nodded.

"Tagath has gone to the fleet. The queen Lura has left for the Sacred Chamber of Law."

Blaine heard Noreen gasp at the man's words. "Rex! That can mean only one thing! Lura knows the revolt has turned against her forces in the palace. While Tagath prepares the fleet for invasion of your Earth she has taken sanctuary in the Sacred Chamber!"

Blaine's eyes snapped. "Then we will go there!"

The girl shook her head. "That is impossible. The Sacred Robot who guards Law and the great controls of the Wall will let no one enter but the ruler of Thallom. The chamber itself is invulnerable to any weapon. It is protected by an impregnable energy field."

Blaine frowned. "But if Lura went there—"

Noreen pointed to the great control screen across the room. "Lura used

the tele-globe. Only this one is attuned to the energy field of the Sacred Chamber."

Blaine gripped her arm. "Can it transport me into the chamber?"

The girl's eyes showed concern. "Yes—but the Sacred Robot will kill you—there is no weapon great enough to destroy him. He was built by the ancients to be invincible in guarding Law."

Blaine shook his head. "It's the only way. Show me how to operate it, Noreen."

A determined light filled her eyes. "Then I will go with you. I am the daughter of the Targal. If I must die, perhaps I can take Lura with me."

Blaine bit his lips but knew he could not force her to stay. He nodded. "Very well." He turned to Kline and Carter. Their faces were grim as they waited for orders. "Bind the guard after we leave," he told them. "Then return to our men on the seventh level. Hold the palace against Tagath's men. If we can show the people of Thallom that Noreen is their rightful queen they will revolt against Lura's law. If not—" He left the sentence hanging.

Then he turned to Noreen. She set her lips and walked to Lura's tele-globe. Her fingers depressed the controls and there was a hum of power. A moment later the screen sprang into focus and Blaine's eyes widened as he gazed upon the vast Sacred Chamber. It was a great oval-shaped room, filled with an amber glowing radiance. At one end there was a great raised section upon which metal busts were set. He heard Noreen murmur: "The great Targals! My father's likeness belongs there!" Behind the long line of gleaming statues was a control panel set with multi-colored dials and switches.

But Blaine's eyes saw only the center of the vast chamber. For where

there should have been a floor there was instead what appeared to be the open pages of a gigantic book. He saw then that the book was actually the floor of the chamber, that there were but two pages to it. And the writing on those pages glowed with iridescent flame.

And standing in the center of the book stood a tremendous robot. Over its head was a great screen that caught the rays from the book and this was, he knew, the screen Noreen had told him of. The screen that projected the Law of Thallom's Ancients to every corner of the planet. The Law by which all the people of Thallom lived. The Law which now stated that Lura was Queen...

And he saw Lura. She stood by the control panel behind the great line of Targal statuary. Her fingers were even then operating the controls.

"Quickly!" Noreen grabbed his hand. "Stand beside me!"

BLAINE stood close beside her and Noreen flicked a green dial on the control panel in Lura's chamber. Blaine felt a sudden humming fill his body. There was a flash of brilliant light; for a moment he seemed to lose consciousness.

But he knew he hadn't. When the light subsided he was no longer in the chamber of Lura. He stood beside Noreen in the Sacred Chamber of Law.

And the great Robot swung around on its metal legs and advanced across the pages of the book toward them.

He heard Lura laugh shrilly from a distance. He heard Noreen cry out to him to run. And finally Blaine found life for his stunned muscles. He leapt away from the sweeping claw of the robot and tried to swing around it to get to Lura. But he was not fast enough. The robot moved swifter than he could have thought

possible. Blaine felt the cold steel of the robot's right arm strike him and a claw closed around his throat. He struggled vainly against the metal creature, but knew that it was futile. Those metal claws held him inexorably. And then a deep stentorian voice issued from the robot's head. It was a metallic sound, resonant, not a living sound, not a dead one, but the most awesome voice Blaine had ever heard.

"Who dares to enter the Sacred Chamber of Law! The penalty of Law is death!"

Blaine felt himself lifted from his feet as the pressure around his throat increased. His blood began to pound in his head, and he knew that in moments the life would be crushed from him.

"Wait!" He heard the sharp cry from Noreen. "I have brought this Earthman here! The Sacred Chamber is my right! I have come to avenge the murder of a Targal!"

The great robot seemed to hesitate, and Blaine felt the pressure relax around his throat for a moment. Then again came the deep, resonant voice.

"By what right do you come here? Only the ruler of Thallom has access to Law."

"I *am* the ruler of Thallom!" Noreen cried out. "Lura had usurped the power of Thallom! I am the daughter of the Targal, Rhendar! My father was murdered by Lura and Tagath. It was they who shut off the power that runs your great robot body and entered the Sacred Chamber to change the Law. You stand on a false Law—not the Law of Thallom's Ancients!"

The great robot gave a rumble of wrath. "The daughter of a Targal? What proof do you have?"

Noreen's voice answered proudly, "I carry the Great Seal of the Targal upon my breast, placed there at my

birth to designate my sovereignty. It is the same Seal that is the true Law—not the fraud at your feet, oh Sacred Robot!"

As Blaine watched, Noreen proudly parted the blouse at her breast. There, emblazoned in the soft fullness of her bosom was an iridescent shield. The great electric slot that served as the robot's eye flashed fire. A beam of radiance shot out from its head and crackled against the seal on Noreen's breast. She stood straight and unflinching as the terrible bolt of energy struck the shield—and was deflected!

"You see, O Sacred Robot, that it is the true seal of the Ancients! Now test your power against the Law you stand upon!"

Noreen's voice rang loud and clear and the great robot stepped backward, still holding Blaine in its metal grasp. He saw the great metal head bend toward the book beneath it. And at the bottom of the page where shone a duplicate of the shield Noreen wore, a crackling blot of energy shot from the robot's head.

The bolt struck the shield and there was a blaze of shattering light.

The shield dissolved!

WHILE Blaine watched, awestruck, the robot rumbled angrily and swept its bolt of energy across the great floor. The imprint of the Law flared into light and disintegrated. In its place shone another page of text. But, unlike the first, the metallic substance of the book resisted the flood of energy.

Blaine felt himself twisted about in the robot's grasp as the great metal being swung around and directed its lethal bolt of force down upon the emblazoned shield of the Targals now revealed.

The energy hit the shield and was deflected in a cascade of scintillating sparks. The shield remained unmarked, Blaine saw, just as its min-

iature duplicate had upon the breast of Noreen.

A vast rumble of wrath sounded now in the metallic voice of the robot. "You have spoken the truth, daughter of the Targal. You are the ruler of Thallom, and by the Law of the Ancients I do your bidding.

Noreen turned to the robot and pointed to Blaine. "The Earthman has saved my life and is a friend of Thallom. Release him!"

Blaine felt the great metal claw respond to her command and he was placed gently upon the surface of the book. As he took his feet upon the blazing surface, Blaine heard the harsh laughter of Lura far across the chamber.

"Taste your victory while you can, slave girl! For I have prepared for such an event! Look!"

Blaine gazed alone with Noreen across the wide expanse separating them from the statuary of the Targals. Lura stood before the great controls and as she spoke the screen flickered into life beside her. Blaine drew his breath in sharply as he saw into outer space, and there, gathered, was a mighty armada of space ships. Already they were slashing through the void toward the great rings of Saturn.

"Tagath has left with the mightiest fleet of Thallom for the planet Earth! Soon he will pass through the Wall—and I will join him for the conquest of your planet, Earthman! But you will not live to know it—not any of you on Thallom! For I have set the great master switch that will drive the negative energy field to over-capacity! This planet will burst asunder and Tagath and I will rule this solar system with the might of our space fleet!"

Sudden fear showed in Noreen's eyes and her voice was uncertain as she retorted: "You will not control

the negative energy field, Lura! Already the people of Thallom see the true Law and have heard what was said here in the Sacred Chamber over the great telescreens. You no longer have power over Thallom—and the men who keep the great energy field in operation will not allow—"

"Fool!" Lura's harsh laughter interrupted her. "Did you think that Tagath and I would leave the control of the energy field anywhere but here? I said I have set the master switch. There is no man who can stop me! Already the forces build up—feel this great planet tremble!"

Blaine felt a cold dread in him as the very walls of the great chamber began to hum with hidden forces. He saw Lura adjust the controls of the tele-globe and the scene on the screen flickered into the interior of the lead space ship. He saw the features of Tagath there, and there was laughter on them.

"I leave you now, Earthman and slave girl! You die together!"

Lura reached for the knob that Blaine knew would teleport her instantaneously from the Sacred Chamber to the control room of Tagath's space ship. He knew it was too late to reach her, but he sprang for the control platform.

Even as he moved he heard the stentorian voice of the great robot. "You have violated the Law of the Ancients, woman of Thallom. The penalty is death!"

AS LURA turned the knob that would send her to Tagath and safety, a bolt of energy shot from the robot straight toward her. She screamed and raised her hand to her face as if that would have protected her. In the same instant the tele-globe flared into operation and started to enfold her with a flash of radiance.

Too late. The searing energy of the

robot enveloped Lura's body. She was lifted away from the control platform and held high in the air over the Book of Law. Her screams echoed throughout the vast chamber and Blaine's blood chilled as he stared at the mighty metal giant in awe.

Slowly, the texture of the energy bolt of the robot changed. Its hue became deeper, and a searing breath of its power singed Blaine's cheek. He saw the body of Lura twist in one agonizing paroxysm. Then it disintegrated into a myriad dust-like fragments that settled slowly to the floor of the book.

"Thus is the Law avenged," intoned the great robot and the beam of energy subsided.

Blaine turned a frantic eye then toward the telescreen where Lura had stood but a moment before. He heard Noreen cry out. "Tagath passes through the Wall even now! We can never stop him!"

Blaine leapt to the control platform. He turned to the robot, towering out in the middle of the vast chamber behind him. "The Law is not yet avenged!" he cried. "Tagath and his fleet must be destroyed! Can you close the Wall in Space, Robot?"

In answer a bright green beam flicked out from the robot and touched the great seal of the Targal in the floor of the chamber. "There are secrets of the Ancients that I alone am entrusted with," the robot replied in a toneless voice. "The Law shall be avenged."

As the robot spoke the shield shimmered and an opening formed in the book of Law. Blaine saw Noreen run hurriedly toward him as the aperture widened, and then he saw a shaft that seemed to drop endlessly into the bowels of the planet Thallom.

Down this shaft the robot sent a brilliant stabbing red beam. Blaine ran to meet Noreen and folded his

arms about her protectingly. Together they saw a wall of black energy rise from the shaft to meet the robot's ray.

There was a rumbling sound that shook the room and Blaine knew that Lura had told the truth when she said she had stepped up the negative energy field to over-capacity.

But the robot sent another beam of force into the black wall that swept up the shaft. There was an explosion that rocked the chamber, and the wall of negative energy collapsed.

In the same instant Blaine's eyes flicked to the telescreen beside them. He saw Noreen glance there too and heard her gasp.

Tagath's ship and the huge fleet behind him had entered the channel in the great Wall of Space between Thallom and Saturn. In moments the fleet would be through it and flashing through the void toward Earth.

But suddenly the void seemed to shimmer in the screen. The asteroid belts of Saturn glowed into incandescence and the ships of Tagath's fleet seemed to erupt into thousands of fragments.

"Look!" Noreen breathed in awe. "The great Wall has discharged its energy field! The fleet is destroyed!"

Blaine saw that she was right. The fragments of Tagath's fleet fluttered in space and were drawn into the asteroid belts of Saturn.

Slowly the telescreen darkened and flickered out. The rumbling deep within Thallom quieted. Blaine turned his gaze to the great robot. The metal giant played a soft ray against the shield of the Targals and the opening in the Book of Law closed. Again the rumbling voice filled the room.

"Thus is the Law of the Ancients avenged. Know you, Queen Noreen, that the energy field is destroyed. The Ancients built it to serve Thallom.

(Continued On Page 161)

PROUD ASTEROID

By Paul W. Fairman

There was no life at all on this planet—nothing animal or vegetable. Nothing alive, that is, except maybe the planet itself . . .



QUITE a stir was caused when the *Sir Francis Drake* turned up one morning over Chicago and signaled for landing instructions. This because the *Drake* had been long since given up for lost. It was one of Morton Parnell's ships out on research exploration somewhere under Orion, and old Parnell had already collected the insurance.

And now, here came the *Drake*, nineteen months overdue, nosing into the Chiport with hardly enough power left to make the ramp. So the *Drake's* arrival became top news.

But that was only the beginning. The real consternation was generated when they found Joe Haney, the pilot, had brought her in all by himself.

There were indications of the true



This couldn't be real! The earth seemed to have paled, and thick lips were sucking up Fleeson!

situation at Flight Control when the *Drake* sounded in and then went wandering off into space again.

Monson, a cadet serving on radar, got the *Drake's* sounding, plotted a course, and then watched open-mouthed as the ship hooked over and started toward Luna. He called Cartwright, the jet officer. Cartwright watched the *Drake* execute a weird loop, stand on her nose ten thousand miles out, before he called Spencer, the top brass.

Spencer watched the gymnastics of the ship like one bemused. "Out of control, evidently."

"No, sir," Monson said. "We took a spectrum on the jet fire. Pretty weak but still hot enough. She should ride in."

"Very well—send out a couple of power bugs."

It might not have been smart, but it was an order. After Spencer left, Cartwright put it through and sat shaking his head. "The way that crate's bouncing around it'll knock those bugs to hell and gone before they can grab on."

"We can only hope for the best, sir," Monson said.

They hoped for the best and got it. The grubby little power bugs nosed up into the *Drake's* irrational orbit like a pair of well-trained bird dogs. They sat on their jets until exactly the right moment and then shot in on either side of the space behemoth to get their gravity plates tight to her sides.

Even then she gave them quite a battle. It was like a pair of minnows landing a four-foot bass, but they hauled her down and booted her groundside with a skill that eventually got the two pilots a citation. Then everybody ran in as close as possible and waited for the crew to quit ship.

They waited quite a while. Finally a single hatch opened up and there

was Joe Haney, a pale, hollow-cheeked waste of a man who looked far more dead than alive.

Spencer, always up front for this sort of thing, poked out a cordial hand. "Welcome back! Great to see you—it really is! The rest all right?"

Joe Haney stared at the proffered hand but made no move to take it. His voice—when it came—was a throaty mutter. "The rest are dead—all dead. I'm the only one left. Brought her in myself. Had a hell of a time—a hell of a time."

He walked down the ramp, brushing people aside with a swimming motion—a breast stroke against a heavy current. Then he turned, as though for information, and found Cartwright close behind him. Spencer had been lost in the shuffle.

"Is Morton Parnell still alive?"

IT WAS a logical question. Parnell had been an old man four years back—on the day the *Drake* jettied out on exploration. An old man and a rich one. The expedition—five and a half millions over-all cost—had been Parnell's financial baby in its entirety. Not a philanthropy, however. Parnell stood to make ten million even though the expedition was only moderately successful.

"Yes," Cartwright replied. "And he'll certainly be mighty glad to see you."

Haney turned and resumed pushing through the crowd but with Cartwright now beside him. "There's no point in his being glad," Haney said dully.

"But, man! You came back. You brought the ship back—all alone."

"Nothing in the ship—expedition a total loss—a big zero."

But Cartwright, of course, insisted upon being cheerful. "Still a great feat, Haney. An epic thing. In the rush, I doubt if anyone thought to contact Parnell, but we'll call right

away. You're in a hurry to see him, no doubt."

Cartwright glanced now at the pitiful exhausted figure beside him. "That is," he added hurriedly, "after you've been looked over by a doctor and had some rest."

"I'm quite all right. I don't need a doctor and I'm not tired."

"But, you—"

"Haven't anything for Parnell yet, either. No report. Have to make out a report right away."

Cartwright laid a sympathetic arm across Haney's shoulders but the latter drew away and began repeating himself. "No report yet. Want a hotel room—a typewriter. Have to write out a report. Then I'll see Parnell."

But when they arrived at the flight office, Parnell had already been contacted and was on the phone. A clerk looked wide-eyed at Haney, entirely conscious of the history-making components in this affair. "He wants to talk to you," the clerk said reverently.

Haney took the phone. He said hello, and everyone in the room could hear the brittle, clipped words of the great industrialist coming over the wire.

"Haney?"

"Yes sir."

"They tell me you brought the *Drake* in."

"Yes sir."

"All alone?"

"Yes sir."

"What happened to the others?"

"I'll put that down in my report."

"Tell me, man! What happened to them?"

I don't feel like talking—I'd rather write it so everything is accurate. I'll get right at it."

"Damn it—don't be so hide-bound. I'm Parnell! That was my expedition. I'm asking you questions."

"It will all be in my report, sir."

And Cartwright, watching Haney, thought: *The way he looks around. The dullness of him. He doesn't look at all as though he's glad to be back.*

Parnell's snort of anger rattled over the phone. "What about cargo? What did you bring in? Did the expedition pay off in uranium?"

"No sir."

"Lorium? Cadmium?"

"No sir."

"Damn it! Did the expedition pay off in anything?"

"No sir. I'll explain it all in my report."

And Haney hung up on Parnell—put down the phone and turned to Cartwright. "If you'd take me to a hotel now—where I can get a room and a typewriter."

"Of course—of course." The jet officer took real pleasure in rushing Haney away before Spencer could shoulder through the packed crowd outside and take over. They got Haney into a cab and rushed him to the Chicago House where he registered and inquired again for a typewriter.

CARTWRIGHT went upstairs with him, but on arriving at the room, Haney closed the door on both Cartwright and the bellboy.

"I'm sorry," Haney said. "I must make out my report."

Cartwright went away disappointed. "I've got as much curiosity as the next one. I've got to find out what happened."

But Cartwright never did find out. That was the last time he ever saw Haney and the report was not circulated.

It was certainly a strange document Haney put together in that room of the Chicago House. He sat down at the typewriter and did not move from his chair for eleven hours.

Nor did he rest when the report was finished. Instead he folded it carefully,

put it in his pocket, and phoned Morton Parnell. As it was three-thirty in the morning, Parnell could not justly be censured for his gruffness.

"I'm ready to see you now, sir," Haney said.

"Well, that's damn courteous of you! Damn courteous indeed! I suppose you want me to get out of bed and come to your hotel?"

"That won't be necessary, sir. I'll be glad to come to you."

Parnell swallowed his anger because he—like Cartwright—had as healthy a curiosity as the next one, plus a large financial stake in this affair. "All right. I'll be waiting for you."

"Thank you, sir."

Haney left the hotel by a side door, skirting the lobby where a group of heavy-eyed reporters waited patiently. He caught a cab and drove north and up under the huge porte-cochere of Parnell's mansion. Parnell himself opened the door. There was a certain grim satisfaction in the tycoon's manner.

"Well—at last I'm privileged to find out what happened to my money. Nice of you to come around. I appreciate it. Do you mind if I ask you a few questions now?"

"It won't be necessary, sir—that is, it shouldn't. I believe everything is thoroughly covered in my report. However, I'll sit by while you read it. Then if you have any inquiries—"

Parnell snorted and led the pilot to a small study on the second floor. Haney sank into a richly upholstered easy chair and seemed grateful for the comfort.

And now, for a time, Parnell ignored Haney. He also dropped into a chair—under a reading lamp—and thumbed through the pages of Haney's report. He scowled at it and began to read swiftly. In fact he only skimmed the part which had to do with the outbound portion of the ill-fated trip. That would be—and was—quite

routine. Only after several pages, did he settle back, forget his own dark frown, and read with marked concentration.

AND IT looked as though we had really struck paydirt (Haney's report read), because this asteroid was a good thousand miles in diameter and appeared to be made of solid ore. As I eased in, Captain Martin stood beside the control table and studied the rock surface through binoculars. I watched his face and saw the grin as though he were already banking the bonus he'd get for finding this huge floating ore deposit.

"Looks good, Joe," he said. "Can you come in closer and sit back on the jets?"

I put the ship into a tight circle and then pulled her back until we were practically standing still over the asteroid.

"It's the McCoy, son, the McCoy," Martin crooned. "Set her down and we'll get to work."

While I was picking out a level surface and bringing her in, Martin called First Scientist Neilson up from his laboratory. Neilson hurried forward and Martin gave him the glasses. Martin asked, "What do you think, Harry?"

Harry Neilson studied the asteroid for a few minutes and then said, "It's a cinch we'll need gravs and there isn't a cupful of air within five million miles."

"And probably no gases, either," Martin added.

"We'll see—we'll see," and Neilson went back to his lab to get ready for the preliminary surveys.

They were completed fifteen minutes after I set the ship on a flat down-slope near a ridge of boulders that seemed to form a backbone for the asteroid.

"No atmosphere," Neilson said. "No gases—no vegetation—no animal life."

He looked pensively out the pilot's window. "Apparently a complete absence of everything except solid rock."

But Captain Martin was jubilant. "Maybe so," he said, "but if we could throw a chain around this lump and haul it back, the price of uranium would drop to fifteen cents a ton."

Neilson shrugged. He seemed nervous and uneasy. In his hand he carried a piece of the rock he'd chipped off and pulled in with a grappling arm.

"This stuff is funny. It—"

Martin scowled. "What do you mean? Isn't it ore-bearing?"

"I haven't run those tests. But I'm sure—as you say—this asteroid is priceless. Yet—"

"Then what's bothering you?"

Neilson was a fussy little man who excited easily. "I don't know! If I knew I'd tell you. Give me a chance to work it over. Right now it's just a feeling I have. The stuff—"

He broke off in the middle of a sentence and started toward the door—back to his laboratory. He was staring at the piece of rock in his hand and he almost tripped over the doorsill.

Martin said, "Neilson's getting to be more of an old woman every day," and then forgot about the scientist. "Haney, you're in command until I get back. I'm taking a landing party out."

I would have given a lot to go with that party, but I didn't ask permission. It would have been useless because there is a regulation that says the pilot and the captain cannot quit ship at the same time. One of them must remain aboard and I was elected.

Martin picked Sam Nixon, an astro-gator—Leary, from the laboratory—and a jet wiper named Fleeson with shoulders like a dock heaver. They all got into their suits and floated out through the safety lock like four ugly birds without wings. I watched them

through the pilot's window, envying them. They pushed up along the boulder ridge and disappeared over the top of it.

That was the last we heard of them for three hours, although I waited in the radio room hoping Martin would contact us.

NIIGHT CAME. It lasted two hours and vanished. The blue sun that serviced this galaxy stood straight overhead when they returned. But only three of them. One was missing. This was an amazing thing—that a landing party would come back without the body of a fallen member. We got them in through the air-lock and pulled off their helmets.

Fleeson was missing.

Nixon was deathly sick and had made a mess of his suit from vomiting. Leary stared straight ahead, white-faced. He was like a limp doll as we took him out of his suit.

Martin, too, looked like a man who had gone through a soul-testing experience. He turned his eyes on me and said, "The God-damned asteroid's alive. It ate Fleeson."

There were five of us in the room and I remember the long moment of silence; five faces turned on Martin as he sat there with glazed eyes staring at me as though I was a mirror in which he saw the past few hours and couldn't believe them.

He had more than that to tell of course and after a while he began talking again. "It looked good out there—like the jackpot you hunt all your life but never expect to find. We went over the ridge with our guns ready and on down the other side. After a while, though, we put the guns away because it was silly to keep them in our hands. Not so much as the smallest bug moved anywhere.

"After a preliminary survey, we began scouting around for a likely place to load the hull. And we found it

too. The asteroid is solid ore so it was just a matter of a good geographical setup. That was what we located—a wide, flat arena for the ship, right up against the hill of boulders where the grinding arms could reach right up and powder the boulders and pour them right into the hull."

Martin stopped talking. I waited a while before urging him on. "Then what happened?" I asked.

"Then Fleeson sat down. He must have been tired. He picked a level spot and went down on his haunches to rest."

Martin stopped again.

"Go ahead."

"You probably won't believe us, but the rock opened up and swallowed him."

"A volcanic action of some kind? The surface split underneath him and he fell in?"

Martin scowled at me as though I'd doubted his word. His look accused me of calling him a liar. "No, damn it! It was like I said! No eruption of any kind. No movement except in that one spot. And it was no fissure splitting open. It was a mouth I tell you! That rock opened exactly the way the mouth of an animal would open and when Fleeson tumbled inside, it closed just the way a mouth would close—two lips coming together—two jaws tightening up.

"Then, after Fleeson had been swallowed, there was no break in the rock whatever—no sign of the tiniest split in its surface. I tell you this asteroid is a living monster and we just saw it eat a man!"

RIGHT HERE—right at this spot—it was as though the thing had been staged and was being played out for an audience because there was another long moment of silence and First Scientist Neilson rushed into the ready-room. He was too full of his own news to see anything out of the

ordinary. He blurted, "Captain! Captain! I've discovered an amazing thing! This asteroid is alive!"

And for a climax, Martin threw back his head and roared with laughter. "You're telling us," he choked. "You're telling us about it now. But it's not news any more, Harry. We just saw it eat its dinner."

It was nervous tension—nerves rubbed raw by the stark horror of what they had seen. Each of them reacted differently, but they were all victims of shock.

Neilson, now predominantly the scientist, hardly heard what Captain Martin said. He was too full of his own news. He pulled at Martin's sleeve. "Come with me—you too, Haney. I've got something to show you that will make your hair stand on end."

Martin had no more laughter in him—nor any more words. We followed Neilson down the central catwalk and into his laboratory.

On a table there, he had pieces of the asteroid in various stages of analysis. "I won't bore you with details of instrumental readings. There are more obvious and more startling ways to show you the truth. Look."

He pointed to a conical pile of rock-dust, took an ordinary pocket comb from his vest and moved it toward the pile. The stuff got out of the way. That's the only way to express it. The rock-dust moved to either side, leaving a pathway through the pile for Neilson's pocket comb.

"I had the devil's own time grinding that powder," Neilson said. "Here—pick up one of those pieces and put it into the mill."

Martin reached forward.

"You'll have to grab it," Neilson said. "It will try to get away from you."

This was true. With Martin's hand an inch away, the rock spun this way and that—like a mouse looking for a

way out of a trap. Then it skittered across the table and hid behind a mixing bowl. I stared in sheer disbelief. And Martin, even after what he'd gone through, was visibly shaken.

"Grab it quickly," Neilson said. There was the eagerness in him of a child with a bright new discovery. Nothing of loathing or fear.

Martin reached around the bowl and got the rock. Immediately his hand began pumping up and down as though he were waving to a friend with a closed fist.

"See?" Neilson cried. "It has strength! It's alive! Put it in the mill."

Martin set his features, exerted considerable muscle power and slowly forced the rock down into the mixer. He withdrew his hand quickly and Neilson slammed down the lid.

INSTANTLY a clatter sounded inside the cast-iron bowl. Martin was still dazed. "It's—it's trying to get out," he muttered.

"Exactly," Neilson said. "It has life. And not only life. It can think! It's living material with intelligence! Do you realize what that means, Captain? We may answer questions now that have kept science wondering since the dawn of thought. This may be the key to creation—this stuff! Primal! Elemental!"

Martin wasn't listening. He poked a finger at the pile of dust on the table—saw the powder pull back and leave a conical hole. "A live asteroid," he muttered. "It ate Fleeson—swallowed him up and closed its mouth over him."

"Be very quiet now," Neilson told us. "Be quiet and listen."

He snapped on the mill switch and it growled deeply as its teeth bit into the rock.

But there was something else—a horror laid upon all the other horrors

to cool my blood and weaken my knees.

The rock in the mill was sobbing, moaning. The sound was very faint over the grinding of the mill but it could be heard. A sound to make me think a man—a woman—a child, had been thrown bodily into a place of torture.

The sound of human agony.

Martin's eyes were glued to the table. I followed them—and froze anew. Neilson—intent upon the mill—was leaning with one hand on the table-edge. And toward his hand, in a menacing stream, moved the pile of asteroid dust. Like a snake, the stuff traveled in a sinuous rhythm. Without a head, without a body, with no apparent means of containing life, it moved towards Neilson's hand, bent upon vengeance.

I yelled and Neilson jerked his hand away. Immediately the movement of the powder stopped. The column of particles was without motion for a moment. Then the furthest end of the dust stream reversed direction to reform itself into a pile—like a snake seeking strength within a deadly coil.

Neilson's reaction was still entirely that of a scientist. The creeping horror of this phenomenon was lost upon him.

"I must trap all these specimens," he said. "But first I must discover what materials will contain them. It's entirely possible the powder can work its way through heavy metals."

Martin went to his cabin to rest and I returned to the pilot room. It was a glum ship that night, with more than one man awakening to look apprehensively at the floor as though he expected to find the asteroid eating its way up toward us.

Why Martin didn't order a jet-off, I'll never know, but he posted a watch inside the ship and the rest of us slept through two rises and settings of the blue sun. All except Neilson, who

worked on feverishly with his strange dust.

And, upon awakening, I had that quick feeling it had all been a nightmare, because I heard shouts in the ready-room and ran up the catwalk to find them just taking Fleeson in through the air-lock.

THREE WAS nothing wrong with Fleeson that the eye could perceive. In fact he was extraordinarily cheerful and beyond all doubt glad to get back.

Martin came in and Fleeson greeted him with a hurt expression—almost a pout. "Why'd you guys run away from—I mean, why did you desert me, sir?"

Martin's consternation was pathetic to see. "Good God! We thought you were dead! That rock swallowed you up. I saw it with my own eyes!"

Martin searched the room with a look of appeal. Nixon and Leary were standing by.

"You saw it too—both of you! The rock opened like a mouth and swallowed him up. Tell them you saw it too."

The pair were in a bad way. They nodded in unison and seemed not able to believe Fleeson stood before them.

The jet wiper rubbed his wrists with either hand as though to restore circulation. He grinned, indicating himself to be too happy about his return to hold a grudge. "Well, I'll take your word for it. Can't say myself exactly what did happen except that there was a blackout in my mind somehow. I'm sure of that, because I came to under that blue sun lying on a flat rock. I was all alone and started back but night hit before I made it and this blasted asteroid's plenty cold after dark. The thermometer shoots down like a plumb-bob."

"You'd better get some sleep," Martin muttered, and hurried out of the room.

There was a strange, confused atmosphere now. Only light duties, of course, but the men went about them literally on tiptoe. And no one passed a port without stopping to peer out at the bleak, silent asteroid upon which we sat. There were whispered conferences among the men and the gossip took a new turn.

But withal, a natural one. It was said a deep enmity lay between Martin and Fleeson. There were details bruited about of a quarrel they'd had back on Earth; some falling out over a girl. Entirely fictitious, of course, and without any logical foundation whatsoever, but with twelve men cooped up in a ship and surrounded by a nameless terror, no logic is needed as a basis for whisperings.

Nixon and Leary were shunned by the rest as co-conspirators with Captain Martin. I didn't like the look of things at all.

Finally I decided to ask Martin, point blank, as to his plans. This necessitated knocking on his door. He'd spent ten solid hours in seclusion and there had been no sign of his coming forth voluntarily.

There was no reaction to my knock so I tried again. Silence beyond the door. I turned the knob. It was unlocked. I went inside.

I found Captain Martin stretched on the floor with his throat torn out. He'd been dead for some hours.

This tragedy put me in command of the ship and in order to stave off a mutiny there was one thing I had to do.

Throw Fleeson into irons.

IN THE minds of the men, the Captain's murder bore out and verified their wild rumor-mongering. I gave the order sadly enough because I couldn't believe, in my heart, that Fleeson was guilty. The man protested his innocence with such sincerity that he was either telling the truth or had

talent as an actor.

Thankful I was that I would not have to pass final judgment. Back on Earth, he'd get a fair trial and would no doubt be exonerated.

But in the meantime, a man had been murdered on the ship. And if I believed Fleeson innocent, I had to concede that a murderer stalked free among us. I made my views on the subject entirely clear to the men and cautioned them against laxness in any form. A murderer who struck once could strike again.

I also ordered an immediate jet-off for Earth. We left the accursed asteroid behind, but a sense of foreboding and danger rode with us in the *Sir Francis Drake* and every man eyed his neighbor with suspicion. An unhealthy situation to have in the quarantine of a space ship.

Only Neilson lived in a cheerful world of his own. He was not unmindful of the tragedy, but his zest for the scientific overshadowed all else.

One day he called me in for a conference. "I've made tremendous progress," he said. "Exact scientific progress. But far more interesting are the theories I've formulated concerning this living matter. I think before long I'll be able to prove them."

"What are your theories?" I asked.

"I believe," he replied. "that the asteroid we just left is a living, thinking entity: a complete and sensitive thing, made up of living particles that function even when separated from the asteroid as independent, conscious units."

It was a big mouthful, more than I could follow in my present worried state. But there were other theories to come.

"I do not as yet know by what process the material achieves thought, but I mean to find out. When we come Earthside, I'll have help and instruments with which to work. In the meantime I have been led to believe,

from certain reactions, that we are dealing with a proud and stubborn stuff."

Strange words. "Proud? I don't get it."

"The material has a distinct hostility toward us. Of that I am sure. Suppose this hostility springs from resentment of our landing? Somehow I have a feeling that's it. The asteroid must be likened in our minds to a race of proud people. In some of my tests, the reactions indicate it."

Neilson's eyes grew dreamy as he pirouetted through the realms of his fancy. "Suppose that asteroid—this stone-dust substance—considered us invaders who had violated the sanctity of its great body by landing a space ship thereon? Interesting, what?"

"There is one point you overlooked."

"I did?"

"Yes. If your theory is true, then why did the asteroid give up Fleeson after swallowing him? There was certainly nothing hostile in allowing him to come back to the ship."

Neilson was crestfallen. "That's right. It seems as though I'll have to come up with another theory."

I left him puttering about his reports and went back to the pilot room. It was the last time I saw him alive. That night he died.

IT WAS about three A. M. I was dozing in the pilot's chair, but was not entirely out because I heard the chronograph chime the hour. Three A. M. and there came a feeling to clear my mind—to awaken me.

A feeling of immediacy and sharp dread.

There was nothing unusual in this silent warning. Men who carry great responsibilities are often sensitive to faint etheric vibration. So it was with me. I sprang out of my chair certain that something was terribly wrong.

I moved down the catwalk and

came to Neilson's laboratory. The door was open. Neilson lay just inside. His head had been twisted around and around until it now hung limp. His right arm was broken and his left leg bent against the joint at the knee until the tip of his toe now touched his groin.

I moved on down the catwalk. To Fleeson's cell. The steel door was off its hinges. Fleeson was gone.

On—into the sleeping quarters.

Sickening—horrible. Death, but in gentler, more cunning, form. Six men lying at attention on their cots. Each one with a mutilated neck. They'd been killed in utter silence—one by one—while all slept quietly awaiting their turn. All dead. Wholesale slaughter.

I went out of the room and discovered Fleeson had somehow eluded me in the passageway because now he was back in Neilson's laboratory and he had not been there before. As I entered Fleeson got up from the floor where he had been reverently sweeping asteroid dust into a pile. He came to his feet and faced me, standing erect and unafraid. The eyes that bored into mine were filled with contempt.

Then, transferring the contempt to his hands, he raised them and tore the clothing from his body, gripping the cloth near his throat and pulling downward with a powerful wrenching until his clothing was in shreds and he stood stark naked.

Then he took into his hands the loose skin over his neck muscles on either side. He pulled downward, tearing the skin from his body—ripping it

away like a garment.

And his skin *had been* only a garment. He threw the last of his flesh to the floor and stood there.

A stone man.

I knew now why Fleeson had been allowed to return. It hadn't been Fleeson at all. They had used Fleeson and the asteroid itself had come into the ship.

The stone man moved toward me. I grappled with him.

HANEY seemed to sense the exact moment Morton Parnell finished reading the report. Lying back, with his eyes closed, Haney said,

"Any questions, sir?"

Parnell laid the report on the table. "It isn't quite complete. Six dead men in the sleeping quarters. Martin and Neilson. Eight out of twelve. Subtracting yourself, that leaves three unaccounted for."

Haney did not move nor open his eyes. "Doran, Bacon, Wilson. They were needed to bring the ship back."

"I don't understand."

Haney got up from his chair. "They died later—close to Earth." He moved toward Parnell. "Neilson was right. A proud asteroid. Determined to wipe out the stain of its violation."

"I don't—"

"Determined to execute all who violated it."

Haney moved closer to Parnell. "And those *responsible*."

Haney reached out.

Parnell felt Haney's hands on his throat. Hard hands.

Hands of rock in gloves of flesh.

THE END

You met this jungle lord in "Jongor of Lost Land"!

You thrilled to his adventures in "Return of Jongor"!

NOW READ: JONGOR FIGHTS BACK!

By Robert Moore Williams

In the December FANTASTIC ADVENTURES
on sale at your favorite newsstand October 19



THAT'S RIGHT ?! YOU'RE WRONG

THE HARDEST thing in the world is to knock cherished beliefs out of a person's mind. Come hell or high water, no matter what the facts are, he'll continue to believe it. However, there is an even worse—certainly more insidious—form of reasoning to which we're all prone. We refer to the habit of believing whatever sounds reasonable—just because it sounds reasonable!

That is an error. Certainly the weird antics of modern science have shown that common-sense attitudes can't always be believed by any means. Look at that table. Think it's solid? Brother, it's mostly empty space! Yet common sense certainly would oppose that!

A superb example of battered reasoning is evidenced by a familiar saw, which we've all quoted at one time or another. "My God," we say, "this pace of modern civilization is killing us. It's no wonder so many people die of heart attack!"

On the face of it that remark makes sense and few of us would dispute it. We see it all around us. Executives die young. Heart trouble affects many whom we know. We're aware of the pace and pressure of modern living and we think automatically that the cause of so much

heart trouble is the business of living in this high tension era.

But that just ain't so!

It may have something to do with heart trouble, but it isn't necessarily the final cause. The simple truth of the matter is that people live today to a fairly ripe old age, whereas formerly they would have died off long before heart trouble would have assailed them no matter what sort of a pace they led. The correlation between the pressure of modern living and heart disease is misleading.

You could pick a hundred things at random and show that long-cherished beliefs are false. Every phase of human activity is full of such ideas. Rooting them out is hard—which is why semantics and logic have had such a field day in modern learning and why they have caused scientists to go round with an extremely skeptical questioning attitude. "I'm from Missouri," the scientist roars. "Show me the facts—and I'll draw the conclusion—maybe!" He's not being stubborn; he's just being logical. Keep your ears peeled for specious reasoning—you'll find it all around you and it's fun to take it apart....

Frank Cain



DEATH RAYS FROM SPACE

IT IS NO SECRET that human beings are continually exposed to radioactive bombardment. Cosmic rays from outer space are always with us in varying intensities. Less well known is the fact that the human body itself contains some radioactive materials, minute amounts of potassium of the radioactive variety. Just what the effect of these combined elemental bombardments is, is still unknown but medical research, stimulated by the development of nuclear physics, now believes that these radiations have some effect on our life spans!

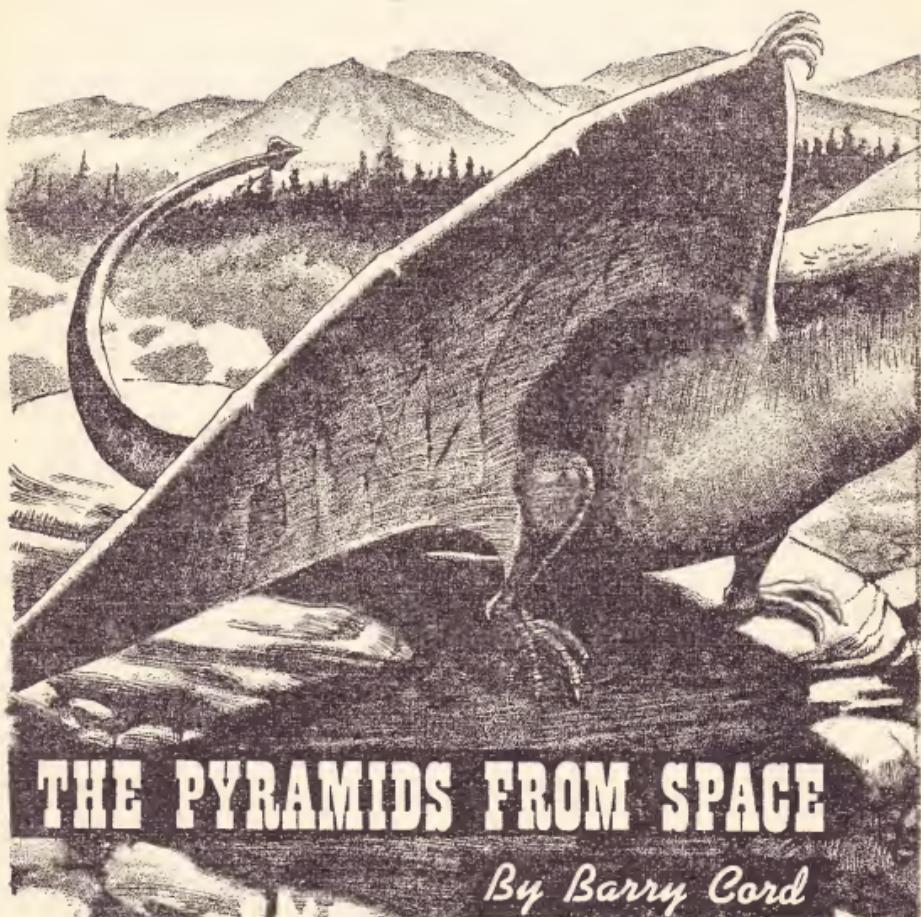
This announcement adds an ironic touch to the whole picture because the theory has been promulgated by numerous science-fiction writers at one time or another. Older readers of *Amazing Stories* may even recall that this belief was one of the premises of the famous "Shaver Theory." As it turns out, the theory was right—accidentally of course!

Further studies in radiological effects on human beings as shown in Hiroshima

and Nagasaki, indicate that the human body has a much greater tolerance for radiation than has hitherto been believed. It may be said safely that the over-all radiological effects of the atomic bombings were not nearly so great as had been suspected and that it appears as if radiation is not the major force of the Bomb.

Another fact has been discerned; it is not so much the intensity of the radiation that is harmful, but rather its duration. People can withstand very strong momentary blasts of radiation without permanent damaging effects, but long exposure (such as is gotten by workers in atomic plants or around high-powered x-ray equipment) is another matter. One scientist has predicted that our life spans are shortened by the sustained radiation of cosmic rays by a period of six or eight weeks. This was deduced from animal experimentation and is still a tentative judgment.

Jon Barry



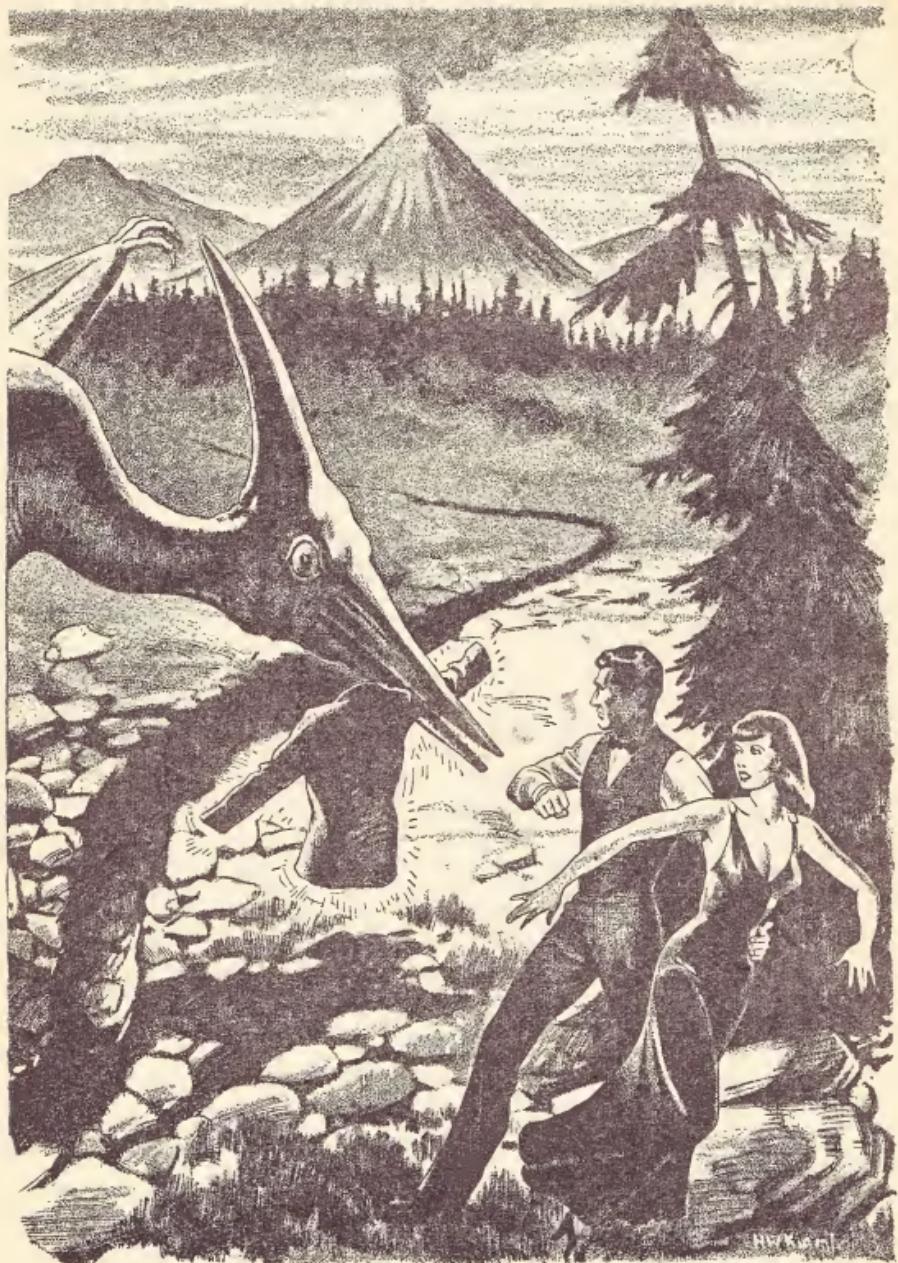
THE PYRAMIDS FROM SPACE

By Barry Cord

It wasn't until Steve Blair went backward to the future that he was able to find the solution to his problems of the present . . .

THE SUN WAS down over the Palisades, leaving a bonfire glow against the wintry sky, when the first pyramid formed in the air above the chill gray Hudson and sank with a little splash. No one saw it.

The second made a hissing sound, like that of a huge projectile traveling at high speed, just before it materialized over the George Washington bridge. Then, amazingly, its speed was abruptly checked, and its slate gray



The coat seemed to bulge into a life of its own as the Force ripped through it

bulk came to rest without a jar in the middle of the roadway on the Jersey side of the bridge.

The Christmas traffic was streaming back into Manhattan. The first car swerved abruptly, smashing its front wheels against the guard ridge. The second, pulling sharply away from the wreckage, ploughed into the twelve-foot replica of the Egyptian pyramid.

There was a moment filled with the metallic sound of impact, the screech of brakes in the line of traffic behind. The pyramid sat immovable, undented—a gray, enigmatic object in the middle of the highway.

Then its solid sides seemed to crumble inward, like a paper box when the air is sucked out. It folded up without a sound. Two minutes after the collision it had vanished, leaving no trace, no sign that it had ever been there, except a car with a smashed front and a stunned, unbelieving driver.

CHAPTER I

THE STRANGE MESSAGE

SNOW SWIRLED gently against Steve Blair's apartment window, rapping with feather touches against the panes. The desk lamp across the room cast a small circle of light on the heavy mahogany desk. A quart bottle of Bourbon, a bottle of ginger ale, and an aluminum pail of ice cubes glinted in the light. The half-empty highball glass in Steve's hand winked as he lifted it to his lips.

New Year's Eve!

One of the wildest and most expensive celebrations in Manhattan's history was going on right now. Blair took a sip from his glass. The snow drove past the apartment on Morningside Heights, swirling like a dancing fog over the squalor of Harlem.

Blair stared moodily. He was thirty and unmarried and a physics teacher at Columbia. He was a rangy man,

and in his college days he had played halfback for the Lions. But that had been years ago. He was still lean and active, but he had lost some of his drive and current events had deepened a tendency to cynicism. He was one of the anonymous hundreds who had fed his technical know-how into the complex organization of Oak Ridge to produce the A-bomb. And now he was back at Columbia, teaching....

The door buzzer vibrated through the stillness. He let it sound, hoping that whoever was at the door would go away. He did not feel like celebrating tonight.

The buzzer insisted. Blair deposited his glass on the desk on his way to the door.

The girl in the hall was tall and slender and vaguely familiar. He hesitated, showing his surprise, trying to find words.

"Mr. Blair?" the girl asked. "Stephen Blair?"

He nodded. Then he found his tongue and said: "Please come inside, Miss—"

"Mortimer," the girl said. She smiled as she stepped inside, shaking the hood of her rain coat back on her shoulders. Steve closed the door,

"I was sixteen when I last saw you," she said, "and I didn't expect you'd recognize me. I'm Frank Mortimer's daughter, Constance."

"It has been a long time," he agreed, remembering. "Six years, isn't it?"

She nodded. The black and beige raintog with its square-shouldered cut gave her a smartness that went well with her long-limbed, easy grace, the sophisticated coil of jet-black hair.

Someone turned on the radio in the apartment across the hall, and a brassy orchestra filtered its music into the small foyer. "Let me take your coat," Steve suggested. "And please come into the library. It's quieter—

and I can mix you a highball if you wish."

She looked at him, judging him and making her decision without conscious hesitation. He took her coat and hung it up in the small closet and followed her into the library.

She paused by the desk, glancing curiously at the bookfilled shelves flanking the fireplace. She wore a simple black gown with a bow at the waist and rhinestone clips at her shoulders.

HE MIXED her a drink and dropped an ice cube into it. He remembered her now—the daughter of his one-time anthropology professor. Six years. That would make her twenty-two. She had changed more than he had in that time, he reflected. She had been a long-legged kid with an enthusiasm for football and jazz records, and he had lost track of her when he left New York for a job with a small research company in Chicago.

He was turning to her with her drink when she said: "I've just come from police headquarters!"

His brows arched questioningly, but he made no comment. She took the glass he offered and her hand shook slightly. Only then was he conscious of the strain in her. Her features were composed and had told him nothing.

"You know about the pyramids?" she asked abruptly.

He nodded. The papers had made cautious reference to them, half afraid the whole thing was some kind of hoax. "They have two of them at the museum on 78th street," he replied. "Commissioner Healy had them brought there and placed a guard over them. Harry Bucknell and I were called in to have a look at them."

"I read Professor Bucknell's comments in the *Tribune*," she said. "He was quoted as saying the pyramids

came from out in space—"

"Misquoted," Blair corrected. "Harry said that, as far as he could make out, they might as well have come from out in space."

Constance Mortimer shivered. "I thought they were a hoax—or some kind of publicity stunt—until tonight. But tonight I was called downtown to verify something. A tablet with a message in my father's handwriting!"

"Your father!" Steve showed his surprise. "But your father's been dead more than ten years!"

"He was on the *Manhattan*," the girl nodded, "when it vanished in the Mediterranean. Dad was a friend of Henry Gordon, the oil man. It was assumed Gordon's yacht hit a floating mine and sank immediately."

Blair finished the rest of his drink. "You say Healy's got something with your father's handwriting—"

"That's why I'm here," the girl interrupted quickly. "I'm terribly confused. Healy said the tablet came from inside one of the pyramids."

Steve frowned. This was news.

For three days the pyramids had sat in the museum wing, somberly gray, silent and unexplainable. Hammer blows had ascertained that they were hollow. But a minute search had disclosed no visible openings, nor provision for openings, in the gray metallic walls that resembled to a marked degree the weathered stone of the Egyptian monuments. An acetylene torch had been used in an effort to burn a hole into the interior without visible effect.

"You knew my father as well as anyone here in New York," Constance said. "Dad often talked about you. I remembered that tonight, and found your address in the telephone book." She took a step forward and placed her drink on the desk.

"I'd like to have you come down to headquarters with me," she said.

"I want you to see this message signed by my father. I want you to tell me if it's just someone's idea of a practical joke."

"I don't think it's a joke," he said slowly. "Perhaps it would be better if it were."

INSPECTOR HEALY was a gray-haired, balding man in his early fifties. He had been a New York cop for thirty years and he had seen a lot of strange things in his career. But nothing as strange as the object he brought out of his desk drawer and placed on his blotter.

He kept his palm over it as he talked.

"I heard about you," he said. He was a hard man with a round, bland face and ice-blue eyes. "Steve Blair—worked on the Manhattan project. You and Bucknell were down to the museum Tuesday."

Steve nodded. He was looking at the object under Healy's palm. It was the size of a billiard ball and seemed made of glass. Light pulsed within it, flickering through all the colors of the spectrum.

"What's that?" he asked.

Constance Mortimer pressed closer to him as Healy lifted his hand. The ball rocked along the blotter, hesitated on the edge of the desk. It rocked gently, as if imbued with intelligence, as if debating the drop to the floor. Then it rolled forward and began to rise.

There was no visible means of propulsion. Only that pulsing, vari-colored light that was obviously cold light or Healy would not have held his palm over it.

Steve watched the strange sphere with fascinated gaze. Healy pushed back in his chair and stuck an unlighted cigar in his mouth.

The ball rose to the ceiling. It rolled along the plaster as if looking for a

crack, some opening that would allow it to keep going. It probed with uncanny persistence at corners, rolled down the walls, reached the window. It began to swing like a weight on the end of an invisible pendulum—began to tap against the pane, lengthening its swing until suddenly Healy reached up and caught it.

"Your guess is as good as mine," he said gruffly. "Your friend, Bucknell, has one at his place, trying to figure it out. Some of New York's top scientists are trying to make sense out of others like this right now."

He reached inside his drawer and took out a hammer. He tapped the sphere. The ball rang with a crystal sound that trailed off into a faint, almost inaudible piping that continued for a full minute.

Like a magician who has gone through his act, Healy pushed hammer and sphere back into the drawer and closed it.

"That glass ball," he said, getting to his feet, "and nearly a dozen others like it came from inside one of the museum pyramids. This was with them."

He pulled out another drawer and brought forth a gray tablet. Steve stepped up and glanced down at it. Except that the tablet was of metal, it resembled the old Egyptian tablets Frank Mortimer had brought home with him years ago from a field expedition.

A message was scratched across the surface, barely decipherable: "*Destroy the pyramids and the eyes of Ankar.*" Below the obviously hurried message was scratched the signature of Frank Mortimer!

STEVE RECOGNIZED the scrawl. He felt Constance's shoulder press his as he turned. "What does it mean?" she whispered.

"It means your father isn't dead,"

Steve said. The fantastic theory he had been turning over and over in his thoughts was taking shape. "It means that the *Manhattan* didn't hit a mine off the African coast."

"Then where is he now?" Constance asked. She looked up into his tense face, reading a strange fear there which was contagious. "Steve—where is he? If my father is alive, why doesn't he come home? What are these pyramids?" She caught at a straw of understanding. "Is it possible that Dad is connected with some secret experiment—?"

"Perhaps that's it," Steve answered. He was only guessing, and if he had tried to put his theory into words it wouldn't have made sense to her or to Healy.

"When did you break through into the pyramids?" he asked the commissioner.

"We didn't," Healy said. "A door opened in one of them this afternoon. According to the guard on duty, it was a little after two when it happened." Healy frowned. He was not a very imaginative man and the pyramids baffled him. He wanted them off his hands.

"The guard said he heard music first, like someone had tuned in on a full orchestra and then turned the set down. When he started for the nearest pyramid, a bunch of these glass balls rolled out. They began to float around like soap bubbles...."

"Where did you find the tablet?"

"Inside the pyramid," Healy replied. "The guard closed the doors and put in a call for me. I went down with Sanders, our lab expert. We caught all the balls. Sanders has one in the lab now."

"We found the tablet inside the pyramid, in a sort of wall rack. The whole interior was lighted up. A pink light that seems to come from the walls."

"You sure no one fooled around with the pyramids?" Steve asked.

"Not after you and Mr. Bucknell left," Healy replied. "I put a guard inside the wing to keep out snoopers."

"I'd like to see that pyramid," Steve cut in. "The one with the open door."

Healy shrugged. "Bucknell just called in for the same reason. He and a friend—some fellow from the Harvard observatory—wanted to see the pyramids again. I gave orders to the guard at the door to let them in." He turned and took his hat from the rack. "I'm coming with you."

THE MUSEUM of Natural History was closed, but the guard at the door recognized Healy and opened up. The empty corridor echoed to their passage.

They took the elevator up to the fourth floor and turned down a long passageway. The lights were on in the wing where the pyramids were kept. A blue-uniformed guard was standing in the hallway just outside the big doors, a revolver held tensely in his hand. He turned a white face toward them as they came up.

"Look!" he whispered. He waved vaguely into the big chamber. "Look!"

Healy paused. Constance pressed against Blair. A dozen spheres like the one Healy had locked in his desk drawer were floating erratically in the high ceilinged room. A single pyramid squatted behind its rope enclosure. A door had opened in it. A pink light flooded its interior.

"It's gone," the guard mumbled. He turned a strained face to Healy. "It was there a minute ago. Mr. Bucknell and that other fellow were inside, looking around. Now it's gone."

"What's gone?" Healy snapped. "What are you mumbling about?"

"The other one," the guard answered. "It was there two minutes ago. Mr. Bucknell was talking to the old

guy. I heard the elevator and stepped out to see who was coming up. Then I heard the noise—like escaping steam—and when I looked back the pyramid was gone."

Healy's teeth clamped through his cigar. "Get downstairs and tell the guard at the doors to let nobody out. Tell Jake to call headquarters for a half dozen men up here on the double."

He waited until the dazed guard had disappeared before turning to Steve. "That's what comes of letting you fellows monkey around," he snapped. "Bucknell's probably trying to get that pyramid out of here—"

"You're excited," Steve interrupted dryly, "or you wouldn't be saying that. It took five men and a hoist to get those things in here."

Healy shook his head. "Guess I am," he muttered. He turned to scowl at a glass sphere that drifted by. "If this is some kind of government experiment, I wish they'd let me in on it."

STEVE SHRUGGED. "If it is," he said quietly, "I haven't heard of it. Nor has Bucknell." He glanced at the lone pyramid, remembering with a little shiver the way the one on the bridge had folded up and vanished. What was the explanation?

Constance shivered. The big hall was still. The huge skeletons of its saurian exhibits did not dispel the feeling of emptiness. "I'd like to go home," she said. "If Father's alive I'm sure he'll get in touch with Mother."

"I'd like to take a look at the pyramid," Steve said. "I won't be but a minute. I'll see you home immediately after, Miss Mortimer."

Healy said: "I'm going down to check with Jake. Want to come with me?" he asked Constance.

The girl hesitated. "I'll be along with Mr. Blair," she said. She smiled

as Healy scowled and turned away. Steve pulled a pack of cigarettes from his coat pocket and offered one to Constance. She shook her head and he lighted his, his gray eyes thoughtful.

"Harry's probably somewhere in the building," he said. He didn't believe it, but he didn't want to tell Frank Mortimer's daughter just what he did think.

She looked at him. "But the other pyramid?" she asked slowly. "There were two of them, you know."

He didn't answer. The chamber echoed hollowly to their steps. Above them floated the uncanny spheres. One of them drifted past as they paused by the cord barrier. Steve eyed the pyramid. A panel had opened in it, revealing an empty chamber roughly five feet square. A tall man could step inside without crouching.

Healy was right, he thought. The light does come from the walls. Cold light.

He put his left hand on the brass knob of the cord support and stepped over. Constance hesitated, then ducked under the rope and followed.

THE INSIDE of the pyramid had a rosy, soothing glow. Steve halted in sudden alarm as a small panel in the rear wall slid aside the moment he stepped across the threshold.

A raised oblong, similar to the ground glass view-finder of a camera, faced him. It remained blank. Immediately below this panel was a small knob of what seemed to be white opaque glass.

"Looks like one of those 'take-it-yourself-for-a-dime' picture machines," he said lightly. He was tempted to push down on that knob to find out what would happen. But there was Constance Mortimer with him and he did not wish to include her in what might turn out to be a dangerous

venture.

Healy's voice suddenly reverberated in the hall. "Mr. Blair!"

"Guess we'd better go," Steve said. He took the girl's arm, but paused to watch the glass sphere that floated into the pyramid. Constance pressed back against him.

The sphere went directly to the white knob, like a bird to its roost. The knob gave a little as it settled.

The panel door slid shut, smoothly, noiselessly. Steve went rigid. He felt Constance turn, and he avoided her frightened look. "It's all right," he said, keeping his voice quiet. "That knob evidently controls the door panel. I'll get it open."

But he didn't reach it. The floor under his feet shifted, went fluid. He made a desperate attempt to reach the white knob. But he found himself suddenly powerless to move. He seemed rooted to a floor that was no longer solid. The pink walls seemed to writhe under some cosmic stress. Only the glass ball didn't change. It sat on the knob like some big, pulsing eye, and on the metal screen above it suddenly appeared a view of the museum wing.

Steve had a glimpse of Healy, his cigar slack in his mouth, staring.... Then the scene dissolved and there were only the sharp, diamond-bright pinpoints of stars on the screen.

By his side Constance Mortimer screamed....

CHAPTER II

THE VALLEY OF SAURIANS

TIME CEASED to exist for Blair.

As through a thick, smothering fog, Steve sensed that Constance Mortimer was there in the pyramid with him, trying to talk to him. Voiceless, her fear penetrated to him. But he was helpless either to move to her or to answer. He was a formless entity, trapped within the force stresses that bound them. Yet he retained

the ability to think and to see what was taking shape on the viewplate above the pulsing crystal ball.

The Universe seemed to have gone wild. Stars streamed by in crazy orbits. Giant suns grew and filled the viewplate with their brilliance and faded again into mere pinpoints.

Steve, himself, had no sense of motion. The pyramid seemed to remain stationary in space while a vast segment of the galaxy streamed past like a broad, coruscating current. There appeared on the cosmic viewplate a great black gap, lighted occasionally by vaguely fluorescent dust clouds, and afterwards there was the steady procession of suns again, waxing huge and waning.

Finally, after what might have been moments, or centuries, the mad jumble on the gray screen steadied. A binary appeared in the center of the screen and began to take on size. Like binaries Steve had once studied, this one consisted of two suns, one a huge, blue globe, the other a yellow dwarf. They revolved in short orbits about one another, held like a revolving dumbbell from drifting apart by the connecting bar of gravity.

Circling these double suns was a lone planet. It was of colossal size, and it began to fill the viewplate, edging out the suns. Soon it was no longer a globe, but a vast section of planet, its horizon tilting upward and entirely filling the screen.

A gray cloud mass obscured details of the planet's surface. Steve knew this was the pyramid's destination—this lone planet on the edge of the galaxy. He knew it with an awful certainty that chilled his boldly imaginative spirit.

The viewplate blanked as the pyramid dropped through the gray pall that shrouded the planet. It cleared briefly to show a flat, barren landscape and the white, square walls of a village.

Then the pyramid began to wobble, as though something had gone wrong with it. The bare landscape seemed to flow across the viewplate. A valley appeared on the screen, a huge pit in the brown earth. A shallow lake glinted briefly. Then the viewplate blanked out completely.

Steve suddenly felt the floor under his feet and the press of Contance's shoulder against his side. Her voice sounded in his ears as though it had never been stilled.

"Steve! Steve! What's happening?"

He put his arm around her, feeling her body tremble. But there was nothing he could say. He had no answer even for himself.

THE CRYSTAL ball that all this while had remained motionless on the white knob rose now. With its rising the panel door slid open.

A steamy heat washed into the pyramid. The odor of dank, rotting vegetation filled Steve's nostrils, momentarily gagging him. Constance coughed.

"We've moved," Steve said thickly. "Constance—we've left the museum!"

"How, Steve?" Her voice held a terrible fear. "Where?"

"I don't know," he answered. He was trying to shut out the enormity of what he knew had happened, refusing to believe the cruel significance of what he had seen on the viewplate. He said: "I'll take a look outside. Wait here."

He moved to the door and shied away as the crystal ball floated past him. Some instinct made him reach for it. He caught it before it soared upward. He was surprised at its gentle tugging. The vari-colored light made an insistent pulsing between his fingers. Without thinking he thrust the sphere into his coat pocket.

For a long moment he stared out at the scene presented, trying to square

his thoughts with the limited view. A grove of low conifers lay between him and the sight of volcanic cliffs making a sharp barrier against the sky.

Constance came up behind him and he stepped out into the grass. Instinctively she followed and then, almost immediately, she shrank back. "Steve!" she whispered. "Steve—where are we?"

He didn't answer. He swung his gaze in a searching arc, finding always the same volcanic cliffs against the horizon.

They were on a hillock somewhat off-center of this saucer-like valley, looking down at the muddy stream that emptied a few miles distant into a shallow lagoon. Mist hung over the shoreline, rising in wraithlike streamers as though the lagoon were a steaming cauldron. Instinctively he glanced upward.

The sky oppressed him. From horizon to horizon a yellow-gray pall capped this world. It was a sullen sky, alien and unfriendly, and a chill washed down Steve's spine despite the humid heat of the valley.

Where were they?

Connie's voice roused him. "Steve—the pyramid!"

He whirled. The pyramid was collapsing inward as if under the press of some giant force. There was an eerie, unexplainable lack of sound. The pyramid walls seemed to fall inward into nothingness. A moment later it was gone, as though it had never existed.

The sphere tugged at his pocket. Gradually Steve became aware of this, and a grim, ineffable fear made him unbutton his coat and hurl it away from him.

The coat humped and bulged gently as the ball sought to escape from its folds. Then the Force came.

IT MADE a sound. It was a sharp, crackling sound that had the qual-

ity of dry paper being torn. It crackled across the clearing, and where it passed things vanished.

Steve whirled, pulling Constance with him. He ran for the conifers, not knowing why, but moving instinctively. The Force crackled back across the clearing, sweeping over the spot where they had stood. A shallow furrow traced its path across the earth.

Connie suddenly stopped. Steve felt her drag on his arm and turned to her. She pointed upward in a speechless gesture.

It had cast no shadow. But Steve felt the menace of this more tangible threat as leathery wings rustled overhead.

A sharp exclamation burst from him: "A pterodactyl!"

The flying reptile glided past less than twenty feet above them. It came to a running stop a few feet past his coat, its leathery wing tips dragging. Turning, it teetered on the edge of the furrow and eyed the two Earthians.

Steve turned a gray face to Connie. "Run for the trees!" he ordered. "Don't stop for anything! Just run!"

He gave her a slight shove and turned back, his hands clawing the earth for some missile.

The coat attracted the reptile. It hesitated over it, eyeing the little humpings of the crystal ball still imprisoned in the pocket. Lowering its wedge-shaped head the creature caught the coat between its sharp-toothed jaw.

The dry crackling swept across the clearing again, as though the Force were groping for something—groping blindly. It crossed the first furrow and swept over the pterodactyl, and where it passed there was nothing....

Steve straightened, forgetting the rock in his hand. Almost blindly he stumbled back, to find Constance standing there staring toward the shallow grooves crisscrossing the clearing.

Wordless, he took her arm. Together

they ran toward the uncertain protection of the conifer grove.

Somewhere on their left, among the fern forest that sloped down to the lagoon, they heard the heavy trampling of some giant animal on its way to the marshes....

They stopped under the friendly arch of the trees. Constance's legs were giving out. Steve let her rest while he turned and looked back across the empty clearing.

He had a better view from here of this valley.

Enormous cycads made a dark swath in the distance, fringing a portion of the central sea. Along the marshy shoreline huge saurians were feeding, moving placidly through the thick reeds. In the distance a pterodactyl was gliding low over the marshlands....

The crazy jumble of stars streaming past on the viewplate had been misleading, he thought numbly. He had taken it as proof they were being transported through space. And all the time it had been a journey of another kind. A journey in time!

Somehow, by some diabolic trick, he and Constance had been whirled back through the aeons and dumped on the shores of some inland sea. Cast adrift, as closely as he could make out, some hundred million years into the Past.

Connie looked up at him, her voice bordering on hysteria. "Where are we? Steve—where are we?"

"Lost," he answered numbly. "We're lost, Connie. Somewhere in time..."

And then, as if in sharp disagreement, the clatter of a tommy-gun broke across the steamy stillness!

THAT TWENTIETH century sound was like a friendly voice, speaking to them in familiar tones. "A gun!" Steve said, turning to face the sound. "Someone's using a tommy-

gun!"

Connie got to her feet. She had discarded her rain coat and her black evening gown stood out sharply against the jungle background. She listened with him, but the burst was not repeated. Nor did the dry crackling of the Force cross the clearing again.

"Steve," she said finally. She had recovered her composure, and when he turned his dark face to her she looked at him with sober expression. "Steve—I can't believe what I've seen. A few moments ago we were in the Museum of Natural History in New York. Then something happened. Now we're on the edge of a jungle clearing that dates back to the Mesozoic. I know," she went on, "my father was an anthropologist. I lived in an atmosphere of field expeditions, Java man, fossil imprints. By all the knowledge we possessed, this valley is a bit of the Mesozoic. But how did we get here, Steve? And that pyramid? Where did it go to? Why, Steve? Tell me why?"

He shook his head. "I'd tell you if I knew, Connie. Believe me. But I don't. I thought we had come a thousand light years through space. But this—" he turned and gestured impatiently toward the distant lagoon—"this is fantastic. All of it is beyond immediate explanation. All we can do is accept it. We'll go crazy trying to reason why. We've got to accept it as a fact. We were deliberately trapped and transported here—whether in space or in time or in both—by someone, for purposes we have no knowledge of. But your father's message must have come from here. That means he may still be alive. And those shots we just heard. Perhaps Harry Bucknell—"

The heavy slam of a .45 automatic interrupted dryly, as if asking to be investigated. The shots were coming from the direction of the volcanic

cliffs less than two miles away at their closest point.

Steve turned a hard jaw to the girl. "We can't stay here, Connie. Let's go see who's doing the shooting. Whoever they are, they'll probably be friendly."

Connie nodded and managed a smile. "I'll try to keep up, Steve."

They skirted the conifer grove, preferring the high grass of the park-like clearings to the thicker growth. Several times they heard the crashing of giant animals moving toward the river; and once Steve stopped short and pulled Connie back to let an armor-plated triceratops lumber past.

IT WAS slow going. Connie's black gown and high-heeled shoes were not intended for this type of travel. Her skirt caught on snags and tore above the hemline, her hair came undone and hung in strands across her cheeks. During one of the rest periods she tore a long strip from her dress and tied her hair with it.

She looked small and tired and defiant as she did this and Steve, watching her, felt his heart go out to her. She hadn't complained once since they had left the clearing, and when she looked at him her eyes always managed a smile.

They were close now to the base of the cliffs. The climb to the rim looked dishearteningly precipitous. Steve searched the barrier for a way to the top.

To the left of where they stood a broad ledge lay across the face of the four-hundred-foot cliff wall. Dark cave openings fronted on this stone platform.

Connie's fingers suddenly tightened on Steve's biceps. "What—is it?"

A stooped hairy caricature of a man had shambled out of one of the cave openings to the broad ledge. He was joined by several others, broad-bellied females. Some of them were suckling

young.

"Neanderthals!" Steve muttered.
"By the Great Horn Spoon—"

The running man came into sight then, appearing out of the rock debris under the cliff. He was a short, fleshy man already winded from his exertion. He was dark and hatless and his coat was unbuttoned and flopped awkwardly as he ran.

He didn't see Connie and Steve, partially hidden behind other boulders. He slowed to a stop in the clearing and turned to face the direction from which he had come.

"Nick!" he yelled to someone still out of sight.

Nick came into sight a few moments later. He backed into the clearing, a tommy-gun cradled in his hands. He was a thin man, taller than his companion. A long white knife scar puckered the entire side of his left cheek. He was a dapper dresser, and even in this steamy heat he had clung to his pin-striped, double-breasted gray suit coat.

The short man said: "Guess that stopped 'em, eh, Nick? Guess they never had a good dose of lead before." He wiped his sweaty face. "Geez, didja ever see such mugs? Where in hell are we, Nick?"

"Shut up!" Nick snapped testily. He glanced back among the rocks, then turned and strode past the other, heading for an opening in the jumbled rocks. "We gotta get out of here, Pete, before it gets dark. I'm gonna try to make the top—"

He saw Steve move into the clearing and he stopped, swinging the muzzle of his gun to cover him. "Hey!" he said loudly. There was a curious relief in his startled voice. "Who are you?"

Steve walked toward them. "I'm Steve Blair," he said. "I used to teach at Columbia."

"Huh?" Pete had come up beside Nick. "A schoolteacher?"

"How'd you fellows get here?" Steve asked.

"We wuz shanghaied," replied the voluble Pete. "We didn't mean nuthin'. We ducked out of Mike's joint on Bleeker when Big Joe an' a couple of his gorillas came lookin' for us. There was this funny-lookin' box—"

"Shaped like a pyramid," Steve suggested.

"Yeah—that's it. It looked like a good place to duck into—"

"Shut up!" Nick said coldly. He glanced at Connie, coming up slowly behind Steve, and his eyes flickered with a pale interest. "How'd you get here? What's the dame doing with you? Where are we?"

"You ask a lot of questions," Steve said, grinning. "We got here the same way you did. And I don't know where we are."

"You said you was a perfessor at Columbia," Pete snorted. "Why don't yuh know?"

Steve shrugged. "It looks like we've been shanghaied all right," he said. "Shanghaied a hundred million years into the past."

PETE SCOWLED. He had a round, comic face and it puckered with suspicion as he looked at Steve. "Million years! You're crazy! I got an idea where we are. I was in the Pacific with the Seabees, an' this looks just like that hell stretch in New Guinea where we laid out an airfield. Only..."

"Only it's different," Steve said, as Pete groped for words.

"Yeah," Pete growled quickly. "I didn't see any mugs like them that just chased us off the cliff out in New Guinea. Geez—what gorillas..."

"Someone's gonna pay for this!" Nick snarled. "I got an idea Mike was in with Big Joe. He must have slipped dope into our drinks. We passed out in the pyramid." He shook his head,

for there were too many details that didn't square with this simple version, but he could fashion no other explanation. "We was tricked!" he repeated darkly. "Damn Mike—I'll get him when we get back! I'll give it to him—slow!"

Someone had played a trick on them all right, Steve thought wryly—a cosmic trick. But it would be futile to try setting these two ex-gangsters straight.

Nick had dropped the butt of his tommy-gun at his feet and was fumbling inside his coat pocket for cigarettes. He swore without regard to Connie's presence, the swearing of a baffled, irritated man.

He thrust a smoke between his lips, chewed on it in sullen silence. Then he seemed to remember and extended the pack to Steve, and in that friendly gesture Steve felt himself tied to these two confused men who would never comprehend the truth. He took a cigaret and Nick held a light to it.

"How'd we get out of here?" he asked Steve. "Which way back to the States?"

Steve shook his head. "I don't know. But I saw a village of some kind, just before our pyramid landed in this valley. Somewhere beyond that cliff. If we could get to the top before night..."

He stopped then, struck by the uncertainty of his remark. There was no indication night would come. The unchanging, dull sky offered no indication of the passage of time.

"We tried that," Pete said. "There's a couple of paths that lead up to the top. A bunch of hairy strong-arm boys jumped us on the way up. Nick had to open up with the tommy—"

"We'll have to chance it again," Steve insisted. "We have to make the top. It's our only chance to get back

to the States." He looked at Nick. "How many shots do you have left in that thing?"

"Bout fifteen," Nick muttered. "And I got a roscoe under my coat."

PETE TAPPED the automatic under his arm. "I got a few left in here, and I carry a spare magazine."

Steve challenged them. "You boys willing to try it again?"

Pete looked at Nick who shrugged. "What've we got to lose?" he growled. "Sure, we'll try it again."

Steve took Connie's hand. For the first time he noticed that her black gown was torn just below her left shoulder. He looked at her without confusion, noting that she was a full-breasted woman despite her apparent litheness of figure. His glance shifted to hers, and her eyes smiled a little uncertainly.

"It's going to be a rough climb, Connie. We'll rest whenever you say."

Her name came easily to him now, as though their intimacy was of long standing. Yet, it had been only a few hours since he had opened the door of his apartment to admit her. A few hours? Or a few centuries?

He shook the unsettling possibility from him.

Nick was already pushing ahead. Pete looked back and gestured to them. Connie said: "I'll try to keep up."

The footpath wound among the rocks at the base of the cliffs, then went up sharply. Bare feet had worn smooth the rock steps to the top. The path joined another that skirted away from the ledge of caves. They took this one. Nick fell back to cover the rear with the tommy gun.

A shaggy creature came out of one of the caves and whistled loudly. Nick laid a shot that ricocheted with an angry whine off the rock overhead. The Neanderthal ducked back into the cave.

"That'll hold 'em," the thin-faced gangster sneered. "They're big, but they ain't so hot."

They made the top unmolested after that. Pete went over first, and Steve followed, pulling Connie up after him.

Nick scrambled up a moment later, breathing heavily.

Connie's excited voice broke the silence. "Steve—the village! The village we saw from the pyramid!"

CHAPTER III

THE LONG SLEEP

THE SETTLEMENT rose out of the barren plain, shimmering against the distant horizon like a mirage on a desert. There was something fantastically unreal about that distant cluster of white walls and Steve, glancing into the sky, saw what it was.

For above the strange village hung a halo of yellow—a ring of intense light, like a band of burnished gold!

For a long time after Connie's exclamation the small group stared without speaking. Between them and the village lay a vista of dun-colored earth utterly devoid of vegetation, a stretch of landscape as sullen and unresponsive as the sombre sky. Nothing moved on the desolate plain. Nothing except a smoke column on the far horizon to the right, a column that went up untroubled by the faintest stirrings of wind, flattening and merging with the heavy overcast.

There was life in the valley below them—a teeming, noisy life of a type they understood. But that life seemed to end at the rim of the plain. Even the atmosphere up here was different. It had a cooler breath and a stillness that pressed against the ear-drums.

Nick shuffled his feet in uneasiness. Pete ran pudgy fingers under his open collar. He glanced at Steve with a

questioning look, and the ex-teacher felt the other's dependence on him. His own spirit had recoiled from the foreignness of the scene, but his adaptability was more developed than that of these two men. He had been chilled by the magnitude of what had happened since he and Connie had stepped into the pyramid. At first his mind had refused to accept the truth. But gradually he came to understand.

He was not unfamiliar with the theories of space travel and his association with some of the world's most brilliant physicists and astrophysicists had opened up vistas of the possibilities in this field. But someone had beat them to it by at least a thousand years. Only dimly could he understand the motive power that had actuated the pyramids and in what medium they had traveled. And even now he was not sure whether they had traveled through space—or in time—or in both.

He hid this confusion from the others. He was a theorist, but more than that he had a resilient toughness that fell back and tackled immediate problems.

Somewhere on this strange planet lay the explanation for the pyramids. And the answer to the Mortimer enigma. For he had no doubt it was Frank Mortimer's writing on the tablet Healy had shown him in his office.

Connie seemed to sense his thoughts. "My father may be in that village, Steve. If he's still alive."

"We'll not find out by remaining here," he admitted. He turned to the silent gangsters. "We might run into trouble. You boys coming?"

Nick sneered. "Trouble's my business, professor. If them monkeys get tough—"

"Quo Vadis?"

The short crisp challenge in ancient Latin made a sharp interruption.

FOR A FEW moments the Earthians froze, seeking the source of that harsh voice. Then Pete Colucci cursed and Steve, turning away from Connie, muttered an exclamation.

A compact band of short, dark stocky men had seemingly materialized along the rim of the valley. They moved with disciplined intent, advancing in a solid line behind their hawk-nosed leader. The wings closed in around the Americans. Behind a protective wall of bullhide shields men fingered their short swords.

With numb comprehension Blair eyed the eagle standard of ancient Rome flying from the lance of one of the foremost warriors. Romans!

Nick started to unsling the tommy-gun. Steve restrained him. "Wait! They may be friendly."

The Roman chieftain raised his right hand. The warriors at his back halted. He came on alone, a tall, dark, hook-nosed man in his early forties, a hard and battle-scarred veteran of a score of campaigns.

His truculent gaze lingered on Nick's weapon.

"Who are you?" he demanded. "You are not Akkans. Nor are you the half-men of the pit."

It had been years since Steve had used Latin. And then only within the academic atmosphere of the classroom. But he understood the man's question.

"No," he answered haltingly, his tongue fumbling with the ancient language. "We're... Americans. Who are the Akkans?"

The centurion frowned. Lifting a muscular, rawhide-bound arm and shield he gestured to the distant village. "That is the city of Akkah," he said grimly. "The Akkans are our enemies; they are in league with the Evil One."

"We are Americans," Steve repeated. "We came in the pyramids. Do you know where we are?"

The other shook his head. "Your speech is Roman, the Roman of the outlanders. But I have never heard of this land Merika. It must be beyond Gaul. Perhaps even beyond the pillars of Hercules."

Steve smiled at the man's reference to the headlands hemming in the straits of Gibraltar. "Yes," he replied. "Beyond the pillars of Hercules. But this is a strange land to us. We are lost in it. Do you know where we are?"

The old chieftain shook his head again. "We were campaigning in Gaul," he said darkly, "with Caesar. I was ordered to make a forced march and catch the barbarians on the flank. We were coming down through a mountain pass when the Devil Wind caught us." He made a short circular motion with his sword arm. "We were transported by this agency of Darkness to that pit of Hades there, from which you have just emerged. We fought our way out, leaving many of our comrades behind. For days now we have been trying to find our way back to Rome...."

STEVE'S BREATH sucked in sharply. What the Roman was saying was impossible. For the man was speaking as though Rome were still the ancient center of power; he spoke as a contemporary of Julius Caesar. Yet Caesar had been dust almost 20 centuries.

"What's he jawing about?" Nick broke in suspiciously. "Who are these characters?"

"Romans," Steve said. He added shortly: "He says that is the village of Akkah. Seems like the boys in that town aren't friendly."

"We'll take care of that," Pete said, tapping his holstered automatic. "Won't we, Nick?"

Nick kept his eyes on Steve. "How do we get back to the States?" he asked. "Ask him that."

Steve turned to the Roman warrior. The man was eyeing Connie with frank appreciation. "A comely wench," he observed with typical bluntness. "Your woman?"

Steve felt the hot blood rush to his face. "Yes," he said flatly. "My woman."

"It is good," the Roman said, nodding. "She reminds me of Tia, the mother of my sons. Fortunately she is back in Rome, waiting for my return." He glanced up sharply at the sky and some indefinable change seemed to alarm him.

"Come!" he said abruptly. "Soon the Long Sleep will be upon us. We must be gone from here before it overtakes us."

"The Long Sleep?"

The centurion dismissed Steve's wondering question. "It is the time of immobility," he said shortly. "It is then that Talia, the handmaiden to the Evil One, comes forth." His voice was grim. "We must be gone."

Steve shrugged. "He says to follow him," he told the others. "I think it's best that we do. The old boy seems to know his way around."

Connie drew close to him. He felt her shoulder touch his and the sensation was suddenly warm and compelling. She looked up at him, a slow, teasing smile in her eyes. "My Latin always was atrocious," she whispered. "But I got by." She laughed at the sudden confusion in his gaze. "I didn't mind, Steve, about being your woman."

He squeezed her hand.

THEY BORE right, away from the village, seemingly heading for the unwavering smoke column on the horizon. The centurion walked with the Earthians, his men falling in disciplined marching order behind them. The clank of their armament was a strange sound in that silent and lonely land.

The monotonous terrain occasionally revealed cracks in the earth, shallow fissures that reminded Steve of the arroyos of the southwest. They saw no vegetation. Nor was there any sign of water in this parched and barren land. The earth was gravelly and packed hard and even in the dry gullies there was no sand.

Steve was becoming conscious of a dryness in his mouth and his lips, a need of water. He glanced at Connie to see how she was taking it.

The Centurion was setting a stiff pace. Connie began to limp. Finally she balked altogether. "I'm sorry, Steve," she said as he bent over her. She was sitting down, massaging her arches. "I should have worn my walking shoes," she quipped. "High heels are a little out of place here."

Claudius looked down at her shapely legs with interest. Steve conveyed her need to him. He turned and gestured to one of his men, who brought a pair of sandals from his rucksack. They were a little big, but the leather thongs held them to Connie's feet. Claudio suddenly bent over her and fingered the badly-run smoothness of her nylons. Constance reddened and pushed his hands aside. "Now wait a minute—"

The Roman warrior straightened. "Soft," he said to Steve. "I'm sure Tia would like something like that. This country of yours—Merika—has other marvels like this?"

"Yeah," Steve replied, chuckling. "I'll show them to you, if we get back."

The centurion was talkative. His name, he told Steve, was Claudio Ancipolo, captain of a mandible in Caesar's Seventh Legion. He had been away from Rome for two years and he had been due to return after the campaign in Gaul.

Steve tried to draw him out. Who was the Evil One? But all he could get from the grim Roman on this

subject was a vague answer. "The Evil One dwells in the flame, in the cave of Ankar."

"Some tribal god," Steve thought, "carried over in the thinking of these men."

As he talked Claudiois kept glancing at the sky. He quickened his pace.

SUDDENLY one of the men behind them called out. Claudiois halted. Not quite understanding, Steve glanced around him. The warriors were staring uneasily at the sombre sky.

It was changing. The yellow-grayness of the overcast was changing, becoming infused with a greenish tint. And now Steve became aware of something else. It was a faint—a very faint—piping sound. A sound that had the quality of the lightest stirring of wind. A pulse beat that conveyed a dread insistence.

"It's too late!" the Roman warrior said grimly. "We'll have to chance the Long Sleep here." He waved ahead to where one of the shallow arroyos broke the monotonous country.

"Why?" Steve asked.

The other shook his head impatiently. "We must hurry."

They scrambled down the gully side. The piping was stronger in Steve's ears. The greenish tint was growing more pronounced in the overcast.

Suddenly Steve became aware of a strange phenomenon. All about him the others were moving with a strange slowness, as though their muscles were submerged in molasses. The Roman warriors, wiser than the Americans in the knowledge of what was about to take place, were seeking places of rest under the cut bank.

"Claudius!" Steve called. The word formed on his lips with incredible slowness. The old warrior turned. He made a motion with his hand, a pan-

tomime in slow motion. His lips framed the command. "*Down!*"

The eerie, piping sounds were loud now, a fugue of tinkling melody pacifying the change in the sky. Little by little the small band was freezing into immobility, freezing into the grotesque positions at which the change surprised them.

Steve turned to Connie. He willed himself to turn, but he didn't quite succeed in fully facing her. He saw her out of the corners of his eyes. She was standing close to him, her mouth open, one hand lifting as if to smother a cry. She made a lovely statue.

The Long Sleep, Steve thought. Immobility. This was what Claudiois had warned him of. He wondered if this presaged Death. Then his rationalizing mind discarded the thought. Claudiois had evidently experienced this phenomenon before, or he would not have spoken of it.

There was, it seemed to him, nothing he could do. Except wait. The thought echoed wryly in his mind. Wait. Wait like a grotesque statue of a man off balance, one arm half extended, his left foot clear of the ground.

Wait!

CHAPTER IV

THE HANDMAIDEN OF ANKAR

THE SKY was a gray-green and the earth was a muddy green, as if it had taken on the strange glow in the sky. This was twilight.

Nothing moved.

Slowly, slowly, even the mind of Stephen Blair began to still. His frantic thoughts had tumbled about within the enclosure of his mind, but under the influence of that twilight sky even his thinking slowed down.

At first he had tried to seek an explanation for this occurrence in a vague theory of combined solar radi-

ations. But thinking soon became a ponderous effort and he gave it up. He fought the Sleep with the intense-ness of a strong-willed man, and be-cause of this he was the last of that group to succumb.

He didn't see the vehicle come glid-ing up the arroyo. But suddenly it was there before him, and his aware-ness of it pushed slowly into his thoughts, as against a rubber shield. It was a two-wheeled car of glossy red metal with a plastic canopy top. It appeared between him and Clau-dius, frozen in a crouched position, his muscular left arm crooked in a downward sweeping motion.

A face looked out at Steve from the transparent windshield—a woman's face framed in a cascade of golden hair that rippled in soft waves onto exquisitely rounded shoulders. It was a face so artistically moulded, so perfectly beautiful, that Leonardo da Vinci would have despaired of cap-turing it on canvas.

A door opened in the gyrocar. The girl stepped out, flashing a long naked leg and thigh before her. Standing, she was almost as tall as Steve, regal-ly poised and unconcerned under the deadly sky. She was dressed in a very short pliant metallic skirt and a hal-ter bra of a softer material caressed high, rounded breasts. A small, light power pack with a short antenna rod was slung on her back.

She brushcd by Cladius, pausing to chuck the old warrior under the hard, bristly slant of his jaw. Then she turned and came to Steve.

Her smooth, delicately tinted face and dark eyes were as young as inno-cence. Her red full lips were at once cruel and sweet, and there was ar-rogance there, too—the arrogance of power.

She came to Steve and put a hand on his arm, and almost at once he felt awareness come back to him.

Sluggishly he regained the power to move, to think, to hear.

This last faculty was brought home by a change in the pipings that had become audible with the coming of the green twilight. The pipings no longer had a complacent note. They were angry, furiously angry. It was as though *something* was displeased at this interruption of the Long Sleep.

"Come," the girl commanded.

Her lips did not move. The word had sounded in his head. Mental transmission, he thought sluggishly, and was only faintly surprised.

HER ANSWER was swift, and conveyed amusement. "Yes. What you sometimes call telepathy. Come!"

He stiffened to her imperious tone. "Connie!" He said the name clearly, and tried to turn to her.

"No!" The strange girl's mental voice was displeased. "I have no need of her, or of your other friends. Nor of the Romans. Not this time. I came for you. I knew you had landed on Gohr. The eyes of Ankar told me."

He said: "Sorry. But I cannot go without—"

Her fingers loosened, and almost immediately his muscles became im-mobilized and his lips froze on the framing of Connie's name. The girl's voice had a cold finality. "You cannot disobey, Stephen Blair. We have no need for the Earth woman. We shall leave her with the Romans."

She grasped his arm again. "Into the *gato*," she commanded.

Steve turned and looked at Con-stance Mortimer. Her rigidity had not changed, nor was there any flick-er of awareness in her open eyes.

"She's asleep," he thought, and with a pang he reflected that when the Long Sleep passed she'd awaken to find him gone. And she'd never know what had happened.

He stepped through the door of the gyrocar and sat down on a padded, benchlike seat in the rear. The girl slid in behind the red plastic handwheel and the door closed under pneumatic pressure. The angry pipings grew faint and a deep hum blanked them out.

The car began to move. It glided down the arroyo. Steve twisted to look back at his recent companions, frozen in grotesque positions under the green twilight of the overcast.

He turned and slumped back in his seat, feeling miserable and helpless. After a while he became aware of the golden-haired girl's dark eyes watching him with level amusement from the rearview mirror in front of her.

He straightened, anger setting his jaw in a hard, belligerent line. "Who are you?"

The girl's thoughts answered him with patient condescension. "I am Talia, handmaiden to Ankar, the Power."

THE GYROCAR moved swiftly over the barren earth, seemingly the only thing in motion under that bizarre sky. It headed in a beeline for the far white-walled village and Steve, peering through the plastic enclosure, noticed that the halo above the cluster of buildings had changed too. It was now an intense, blinding green and a partial explanation came into his mind.

This green twilight was the result of the blue and yellow suns, both shining now with equal intensity upon the lone planet. This condition, he reasoned, would last until the blue star eclipsed the yellow sun, and then "night" would come over the planet and the overcast would take on a depressing blue hue.

But the phenomenon of the Long Sleep? Something in the combined radiations from the two suns quite

possibly induced a strange catalepsy . . .

Talia's voice intruded into his speculations. "Yes, that is so, Ste-fan. The *badar* radiations have that effect on all foreign life on the planet. It does not last long, but during this interval the *piliie* feed on the life forces of the sleepers."

"The *piliie*?"

"Yes. The makers of the piping sounds. The invisible people. They are the true natives of this planet of Gohr. We are all strangers here. Even Ankar, the Power. Were it not for the shield of Ankar which I carry and which protects us from the *badar* radiations, we, too would sleep."

Steve tried to grasp this concept. "Who is Ankar?"

"Even I know not," Talia admitted. "But he is greater than Osiris—greater even than Ammon-Ra, the sun god. He is *the Power*."

Steve leaned forward. "It was Ankar, then, who built the pyramids and sent them to Earth?"

"For more specimens—yes," Talia answered. "The crude ether coils were not selective enough. It was I who designed the pyramids and had them sent to Earth."

"Why? For what purpose?"

"For men like yourself," Talia said frankly. "For a sampling of what civilizations have so far produced on Earth. Inquiring minds would be most apt to be so trapped. And I have need of trained minds, minds that have an understanding of nuclear physics. So far, the pyramids have been unusually successful."

STEVE RELAPSED into mental silence. The gyrocar was coming to a halt before the white walls of Akkah. They loomed up over the small vehicle, twenty-five feet high, and they looked as ancient as the weathered walls of old Jericho. Huge

wooden doors as high as the walls looked as though they could withstand any old-time battering ram. Watchtowers on the walls flanked the heavy portals.

The gyrocar halted some fifty yards before this massive gateway. The entire village, Steve saw, was enclosed by a "moat" of green light less than twenty feet wide.

It was only a band of light, but Talia evidently respected it. She touched a lever on the dashboard in front of her.

The "moat" broke. For the space of seventy feet—the width of the gateway—the light winked out, as though some shield had come between the earth and the light pouring through the circular opening in the overcast.

The huge doors swung inward on noiseless bronze hinges. As they opened the gyrocar moved forward, gliding across the "bridge" into the village. Glancing back Steve saw that the light came back within a few moments of their crossing, completing the ominous circle.

They drove down a wide thoroughfare flanked by enormous statues of old Egyptian gods. The broad steps and white walls of a massive building terminated the roadway.

Steve saw no signs of life. As far as he could make out Akkah might have been a village of the dead.

"The Long Sleep," Talia said. "Everyone on the surface of Gohr sleeps. It is best that way."

They drew up before the imposing building at the end of the street. With Talia's hand on his arm Steve was able to move, although sluggishly. They walked up the wide stone steps, past huge pillars of white marble, through a high doorway.

Light filtered through high overhead slits, slanting in green bars into the great hall. Smaller-sized replicas

of the Egyptian gods were pedestaled in niches all along the way.

At the far end of the long, dimly-lighted chamber a small figure sat upon a throne. To Steve, walking toward it, the scene was a tableau carved in marble. Attendants kneeled in frozen attitudes on either side of the unmoving figure.

"That is Sol Eban," Talia murmured. "Ruler of Akkah—by the grace of Ammon-Ra. And Talia," she added coldly.

THEY WALKED down that silent hallway, like spectral beings along the hall of the dead. Walked to the throne of Sol Eban, over which hung the sun-ball and feathers of an ancient Earth god, Ammon-Ra.

Ten steps led to the throne. Talia paused at the foot of them. "Kneel!" she commanded.

Steve rebelled. He started to turn to her, but her hand lifted from his arm, and immediately he felt the slowdown of his muscles. He turned laboriously to face the figure on the throne.

"Kneel!" Talia commanded again. But he denied her with a grim stubbornness only force could have overcome. He was freezing into immobility there at the foot of those stone stairs, but he looked up at Sol Eban with a defiant stare.

Talia's laughter rippled in his ears. "You are a stubborn one, Ste-fan." She slurred his name in a soft, caressing way. "I think I shall have use for you. When we return to Earth."

The pipings were clamoring in his ears. The *piliie*, he thought drowsily. The last thing he remembered was looking up at Sol Eban, and noting that the ruler of Akkah was a small, well-knit man with dull black eyes that were staring fixedly at him. Then the Long Sleep claimed him and the *piliie* swarmed triumphantly in to feed....

Tall and regal and unconcerned, Talia turned and walked away from the frozen figures at the throne of Sol Eban. She walked down past the silent, watching statues, a goddess greater than the stone ones that watched her pass.

On all that vast, silent planet, she alone had the power of motion....

CHAPTER V

POWER FOR CONQUEST

SLLOWLY THE blue light replaced the green. The vast orb of the huge blue sun was moving between the yellow dwarf and the lone planet of Gohr, and down on the plains of Akkah the pipings of the *piliie* began to fade.

The power of thought came back to Connie. She roused and looked about her. It seemed as though only a moment before Steve had been turning to her. Now she couldn't see him. She was very tired. She sank to the ground, one bare leg and thigh exposed by a rent in her satin skirt. She was unaware of this.

"Steve!" she called drowsily "Steve! Where are you?"

The others were moving around her. Those who had been caught standing following her lead and finding rest on the hard, bluish earth. She turned her head, her eyes searching for Blair. He was gone. Her mind refused to accept this at first. "Steve!" she called with sudden anxiety.

Claudius answered her. He alone was standing, looking down at her like a stern father. "He's gone," he said. She understood him. "Talia came. I saw her, just before the Long Sleep closed my eyes. She took him away with her."

Connie turned, seeking comfort in the two men of her time. Nick was eyeing her with a look that caused her to cover her legs with a sudden

rush of shame. Pete said: "Geez, I'm tired. Guess I'll catch forty winks."

But Claudius was shaking his head. His voice roused his men. "We must go on," he said to Connie. "Talia knows where we are now. The Akkans would kill us if they caught us here."

He barked out sharp commands. His men got to their feet, a grim, tired lot weary under the weight of shield and lance. They fell into marching order with uncomplaining weariness.

Pete sprawled on the ground, resting his head in the palm of his crooked hand. He cocked an eye at the watching Romans. "You guys kin go ahead," he mumbled. "Me, I'm staying right here. I'm tired."

Claudius strode to him. Reaching down, he jerked the fleshy gangster to his feet. "You're coming!" he said sharply. "We cannot lose time."

PETE JERKED loose from the other's grasp, a sudden anger flaming his round face. He reached inside his coat for his automatic.

Claudius slapped his face. The blow whirled Pete partially about and the drawn gun went off in his hand. The bullet ploughed a small furrow in the earth several yards past the Roman chieftan.

The explosion, more than Pete's reaction, seemed to surprise Claudius. He stiffened, staring at the metal weapon in Pete's hand.

Nick came forward, unslinging his tommy-gun. Pete was shaking his buzzing head. He came out of it with an ugly twist to his lips. "Why, you goddam monkey," he snarled. "I'll show you who's—"

Connie stepped swiftly between them. "Pete, he only wanted you to come with us. He's afraid of staying here...."

The Roman warriors had fanned out at the first sign of trouble. Now the wings were closing in. One man

raised his lance and Nick, swinging around, let go with a burst.

The man doubled and sprawled on his face. The others halted, staring coldly at the Americans.

"That's what'll happen to all of them if they get wise," Nick sneered. "You speak their lingo. Tell them to scram. We'll take care of ourselves. Go on—tell them!"

Connie turned to Claudius. Her Latin was bad, but Claudius understood her. He was a wise leader and he had seen the death-dealing power of the American weapons.

He shrugged, and there was a hard sneer on his face as he gave his orders. He turned away without further protest and his men followed him down the narrow arroyo.

Connie stared after them until a bend took them out of sight. Without Steve she suddenly felt lonely and afraid, and not until Claudius had gone was she conscious of having made a wrong choice. She turned and looked at Pete.

Colucci was still raging at the cuffing he had received. "Shut up!" Nick told him contemptuously. "I'll do the yapping around here." He looked at Connie and licked his lips.

"We'll head for that town, the one they were all afraid of. I don't go for that doubletalk, see. All that guff about being off Earth. That's all right or the kids who read *Buck Rogers* and *Superman*. But not for me. I'm smart. Somebody's pulling a fast one, and I want in on it."

Pete nodded. "Sure. And if anybody gets funny, we'll let little roscoe do our arguing." He sneered at the dead Roman. "That's one monkey who lost his argument."

There was no choice. Connie nodded agreement. She saw Nick look at her again and a hot, angry flush stole over her. "Steve!" she whispered silently. "Oh, Steve!"

THE LIGHT was blue against the overcast, and still the village of Akkah slept. The moat was now a circle of blue light, less intense than the yellow or the green. It filtered through the columns of the huge hall of Ammon-Ra, to the dais where Sol Eban held court.

Slowly Steve Blair became aware of his surroundings. He was on the bottom step, staring up into a pair of black, unblinking eyes that were beginning to light with a sharp surprise.

The attendants stirred. They pulled away from the throne and turned to face the lone man at the foot of the stone steps. They were giant Nubians, dressed in loin cloths, their naked, muscled torsos glinting in the blue light. Each held a huge, iron-tipped lance in his right hand.

Sol Eban came to his feet—a small, wiry man with an arrogant mien. There was a naked ruthlessness in this man that angered Steve and created a dislike even before a word passed between them. Sol Eban was not the type of man content to rule over a village like Akkah.

"Who are you?" Sol Eban asked, and once again the words were in Steve's head. Mental transmission of speech was not confined to Talia, thought Steve, and he saw Sol Eban bob his head in sudden understanding. It gave him a startled feeling to realize that the other could thus sense his thoughts and he made a resolution to shield them.

"So Talia brought you here," the ruler of Akkah stated. "You must be Ste-fan Blair, latest arrival from Earth."

Blair shrugged, holding onto his composure with an effort. At least, he thought wryly, Sol Eban was under no delusion he was still on Earth.

The Egyptian looked him over with penetrating glance. "You are dressed

like the others," he observed. "You, also, must come from the land beyond the great pillars of Hercules. The land of Merika."

The others, thought Steve, must be Harry Bucknell and Leland Stanford, the Harvard astronomer.

"Merika is a powerful country, I am told," continued Sol Eban. "A very powerful country. Much more powerful than the ancient kingdom of Sumeria, the land of my ancestors."

Steve shrugged. "Yes," he admitted. "But sometimes power gets to be a curse."

"You think so?" Sol Eban said, surprised. Then he leaned forward, putting his weight on his hands gripping the stone sides of his throne. "Everything is power, Earthman. Even here. It is power that holds the sky from destroying us. Power that protects this village from our Roman enemies. It was a power greater even than you know in Merika that brought you here." He laughed, suddenly arrogant. "You think you are mighty in your land, Earthman. But you do not yet know the full meaning of power. This meaning Earth will come to know when we, the chosen of Osiris and Ammon-Ra, come back to Earth. Not as a handful of people plucked out of time and cringing before the progress of four thousand years. But as conquerors, Earthman—conquerors!"

STEVE STARED in silent wonder at the man's intensity.

Sol Eban caught himself and eased back in his chair. "Already the machines are being calibrated. The transport pyramids, already have been built in the Hall of Power under the direction of Talia. Soon we shall return...."

He stopped talking, arrested by the sight of someone coming up behind

Steve. Fear momentarily swept the arrogance from his dark eyes.

Talia's cool voice rang in Steve's mind. "You talk too much, Sol Eban. Remember, Ankars has not yet gone!"

Sol Eban rose. Talia came up beside Steve. "Come," she said to Blair. "I will show you to your friends. They shall be pleased to see you."

Sol Eban made a gesture as if to stop them. Talia turned. The ever-present power pack of her shoulders generating the "field of Ankars" caught the thin blue light and sent it shimmering. Sol Eban quailed at the look in her eyes. He sank back on his throne, sullen and dangerously silent.

Steve followed this strange girl down the long hallway, past the pedestaled gods, to a side passageway that led along a breezeway spanning a courtyard to another wing.

Two huge Nubian guards stepped away from a bronze door as they approached. At Talia's nod one of them pushed the door open.

"I shall return for you later, Stefan," Talia said. "When I am ready to take you to Ankars."

She turned away and Steve walked past the silent, impassive guards into a large room ventilated by two slit windows in the far wall. Two men were sitting disconsolately on a gilded bench in the middle of the room.

"Harry!" Steve hailed, striding forward.

Behind him the bronze door clanged shut with grim finality.

BUCKNELL came to his feet with an amazed cry. His companion, an older and more frail man, turned and watched Steve come toward them.

Bucknell was a husky six-footer who looked more like a pro football

player than a topflight physicist. He had a ruddy face and a hearty manner of speaking, and he kept his forty-seven years on the minus side by a rigorous schedule of exercise.

He came to meet Blair with outstretched hand. "Steve!" he boomed. "It's good to see you."

Steve said: "I'm not so sure I'm glad to see you," with a wry smile. "I'd rather be back in Manhattan, getting over a legitimate hangover, than this." He glanced past Bucknell to the gray-bearded dignified man on the bench.

Bucknell turned and waved his hand in an inclusive gesture. "Steve—this is Leland Stanford. You know—with the Harvard Observatory. Charted that new comet last year..."

Stanford came to his feet. He had bright blue eyes in a lined and somewhat worried face and a nice smile which made him look younger by a dozen years when he used it.

"Mr. Blair," he greeted, extending his pale, veined hand. "Harry's mentioned you often. You wrote a paper on negative charges which I found most interesting."

"I'm glad you liked it," Steve said. "Harry found it too imaginative to suit him."

"Imagination is the door to man's destiny," Stanford murmured. "I always fancied mine. But I confess I am staggered by all this." He waved an arm vaguely toward the door. The brightness went out of his eyes then, as if it had been kindled only in greeting. He looked old and beaten. "We're lost, Steve. Lost on some planet clear out of our galaxy. I can't adjust to it. It is too utterly fantastic."

Bucknell was a more practical man. He said: "You got here in the pyramid, I presume. Anyone else with you?"

Steve nodded. He walked to the

far end of the room and looked up at the narrow windows ten feet above him. The blue glow was coming through and his face looked thin and drawn in its subdued light.

"Constance Mortimer was with me," he answered. "Frank Mortimer's daughter."

STANFORD sank down on the bench and buried his face in his hands. He was too old to take the incredible thing that had happened. His mind could view it and accept the truth without flinching, but his spirit shrank from it.

But Bucknell was a fighter. "Frank's girl," he said with some surprise. "I knew her quite well. A brainy, interesting girl. Nice figure, too. Tell me, where is she now? What happened to you?"

Steve told him. "I've got to get out of here," he concluded grimly. "She's stuck out there with two Hollywood-type gangsters and a bunch of Romans who think they're lost somewhere in Gaul." He laughed without much humor. "It's funny, isn't it, Harry. All my life I've dared to dream of seeing the day men made the first tentative explorations in space. With the first demonstration of atomic power in New Mexico, the dream seemed quite near. Maybe in ten, twenty, thirty years we'd see space rockets landing on the moon. Mars didn't seem impossible. And now—"

"Now we've been plucked off Earth and carried a thousand light years through space," Stanford concluded, lifting his head. His eyes had a hopeless stare. "A thousand light years, Blair! Do you know what that means?"

Steve shrugged. "Are you sure of that, Stanford?"

The other laughed.

"We didn't move through space as we know it," Steve insisted. "We

couldn't have come this far from the solar system in the little time the flight lasted."

"How long do you think your little flight lasted?" Bucknell interrupted dryly. "Can you guess?"

Blair looked at him. "You mean..."

"What else?" the physicist said. "It might have taken a year, ten years, a hundred. We moved through "stressed" space—a convenient term for something we know little about—and even time changed. What do we know about this planet? Why, we may even be in a different space-time continuum of the Universe. Your account of the Romans bears me out. Claudius was a centurion under Julius Caesar. That was two thousand years ago, Earth time. But to him it was but a few weeks since the incident in ancient Gaul. Do you see, Steve? Even our metabolism is changed here, slowed down to a fraction of its normal working back on Earth."

STANFORD shook his head. "We're lost," he repeated. "A thousand light years from Earth. I know."

Steve sat down beside Stanford and looked up at Bucknell. "Trapped—like flies in a lawn bottle."

"More likely like guinea pigs in a laboratory cage," Bucknell said heavily. "That's the way I see it, Steve. Those pyramids were designed to bring from Earth whatever wandered into them. For what reason? They weren't destructive. They weren't weapons for conquest. Traps!" he repeated grimly. "That's just what they were. Cosmic traps. Designed to bring back specimens from Earth—specimens to be studied by whoever designed them."

"The valley of the dinosaurs," Steve said. "The Akkans. The Romans."

Bucknell nodded. "That force you spoke of—the force that swept across the clearing back in that valley, taking your coat and the pterodactyl with it. Whoever is doing this must have used that force clear across to Earth in early times, scooping up bits of flora and fauna. That valley was evidently created by this Power. The saurians were placed in it, under conditions carefully approximating their environment on Earth. The Romans were thus taken. Steve—the whole planet must be a gigantic laboratory for this Being, this Thing Talia calls Ankar, the Power. The Akkans themselves, she told us, were pulled across space almost four thousand years ago."

Steve straightened, remembering the intensity of Sol Eban's revelation. "They're the dangerous ones," he growled. "Whoever this Ankar is, he is an impersonal quality. But the Akkans plan conquest. With the aid of Talia."

"A strange woman," Bucknell said, his eyes lighting up. "Beautiful as a goddess and cold as polar ice."

A restlessness laid hold of Steve. He began to pace under the high, narrow windows. "There must be a way out of here," he said angrily. "If we could make the outside."

"What then?" Bucknell asked flatly. "Where would we go?"

"To the cave of Ankar, whatever that is," Steve answered grimly. "Where the pyramids are!"

CHAPTER VI

THE MOAT OF DEATH

THE WALLS of Akkah lifted slowly out of the bizarre blue plain. The village took on shape. It sprawled in a roughly circular pattern slightly more than two miles across, an incongruous touch of intelligent life in a barren and utterly

alien landscape.

There were no roads to Akkah. It loomed up like an unreal picture, a dead city under a blue sky. The closer they came to it, the more Constance Mortimer shrank from the inhospitality of it.

The air had a close dry quality. In the long march from the dry wash where they had split with Claudius and his Romans, they had felt no cooling breeze, no stirring of air whatever.

Pete Colucci had long since discarded his coat and yellow floral tie. A beard was beginning to darken his jowls. He wiped his hot face with the back of his hand. The underarm holster chafed him, but he suffered its weight with cursing patience.

Nick clung to the tommy-gun, constantly shifting its growing weight. He still wore his double-breasted suit coat and tightly-knotted wine tie, as if denying this hostile environment. He was Nick Pavoulkos, and he didn't go for this Buck Rogers stuff. If the monkeys in the town ahead wanted to play rough, he'd get rougher....

The broad wooden gates suddenly drew his attention. They were opening, silently, on oiled hinges.

Nick halted a dozen feet from the blue circle of light that ringed the village. Pete and Connie paused beside him, staring at the girl being revealed by the opening portals.

Pete sucked in his breath. "Geez!" he said admiringly. "That's some pin-up!"

A sharp twinge went through Connie. The girl in the gateway had a breathtaking beauty, a commanding presence that stirred admiration even in the Mortimer girl. She stood looking at them with a coldly amused smile.

Her lips did not move, but her voice sounded a warning in their ears. "You should not have come to Akkah. Ta-

lia has no need of you."

"Oh, no, you don't," Nick snapped, unslinging his tommy-gun. "Maybe you're the big cheese around here—and you got plenty of class, I admit—but we're coming in, see? We want to get back to the States. And we don't want no doubletalk—"

"Fool!" the girl said softly. "Go back before it is too late!" She made an imperious motion with her arm. "Go!"

Nick sneered. "You don't scare me with that big talk. We're coming in. And don't try to close those gates." He made a threatening motion with the tommy-gun. "This thing talks big, see."

HE STARTED to walk toward the light ring. Pete and Connie waited. There was a curious fascination in Connie. There was something deadly about that light "moat" she could feel but could not explain.

Talia made no further effort to stop them. She stood framed in the gateway, an easy target for the man advancing upon her. On the wall two black Nubian guards stood with folded arms across their massive chests, confident in their own security.

Nick paused a few feet from the circle of light. Some inkling of danger cautioned him. Pete broke away from Connie's side, his eyes on Talia. "I'll take care of her, Nick," he grinned. "You cover those jazabooz on the wall—"

He was still grinning when he stepped into the light.

There was no sound. None except the dull clump of his automatic as it smashed into the earth beside the suddenly flattened, unrecognizable thing that had been Pete Colucci, small-time Broadway gangster.

Nick uttered a strangled cry. Fear clawed at his taut nerves and he whipped the tommy-gun up and started to spray lead at the girl in the

doorway.

There was less than eighty feet between them. But the bullets seemed to spend themselves traveling that distance. They kicked up little puffs of earth at Talia's feet.

"Fool!" The word mocked Nick. "You cannot harm Talia, handmaiden to Ankar. Go now, before it is too late!"

She turned her back to them, contemptuously ignoring the popping-eyed man with the gun. Behind her the gates began to close. In the blue light the pulped mound that had been Pete Colucci glistened with grisly warning....

STEVE BLAIR heard the staccato clatter of the tommy-gun as it filtered through the high windows. Hope flared up in him, breaking through his numbed contemplation.

"Nick!" he said, and the picture of Constance Mortimer flashed in his mind. He had not guessed how much he missed her, but the sudden thought of her out there, alone and frightened, sickened him. It was his fault she had gotten into this, and by all the gods that were, he'd see that she got back to Earth.

Bucknell came up beside him, his face lighting, and even Stanford roused himself to listen. They waited with tight, hopeful faces, but the gun made no further sound, nor did they hear any other commotion.

Gradually the expectancy died within them. Bucknell managed a wry smile.

"Never guessed the sound of a gun would make me feel like that," he said. "For a minute I felt as though I were back home."

"I'd welcome the sound of a car backfiring," Steve said grimly. "Anything except this smothering stillness. Nothing seems to move here, not even a breeze."

"They'll never get through the gra-

vity lane," Stanford said wearily.

Steve turned and looked at the older man. "Gravity lane?" Then, "You mean that circle of light is—"

Bucknell answered for Stanford. "Yes. Didn't you figure that one out, Steve?"

Blair shook his head.

"Talia told us about it," the physicist explained. "The day she took us to Akkah. The pall in the sky is manufactured in the cave of Ankar. It's a gravity nullifier. This planet is a thousand times the mass of earth. Its gravity would pull us down to a pulp. But the mist cuts it. It keeps the gravity pull to that of Earth. That's why you feel no different here. But where the mist is cut and the light of the double suns come through, the full force of gravity comes into play. That circle of light is truly a protective moat." He added grimly, "a moat no living thing can cross."

"Then there's no way we can get out of the village," Steve said, "even if we managed to escape from this room?"

BUCKNELL shook his head. "Only Talia has the power to cut the gravity lane. Even the Akkans are imprisoned here at her mercy. They are afraid of her. They look upon her as the incarnation of their ancient goddess, Osiris, who will some day deliver her from this strange land. But they are afraid of her."

Steve squared his shoulders. "Then she's our only hope. Somehow, we'll have to overpower her. Get her to open the gravity lane for us—"

"And then what?" Stanford interrupted petulantly. "Then what, Blair?"

"We'll find the cave of Ankar," Steve replied. "Sol Eban told me the transport pyramids were ready to take the Akkans back to Earth. Once we find them..."

Bucknell made a short gesture with his hands and turned away.

Stanford looked up at Steve with a faint flicker of a smile. "You are young, Steve. But even you must realize our impasse. What can we do against a power that has mastered forces such as these? You talk of finding the cave of Ankar. But we do not even know what that is—or what Ankar is like. Is he human, as we know the word? Or some utterly alien and incomprehensible form of life to whom we are as ants? The latter seems most likely from past events. Harry has made the point that we were brought here in the pyramid traps as specimens to be studied, the way naturalists and zoologists study animals back home. This whole planet, or what we saw of it, is one vast laboratory. To this "being" we are nothing more than that. What can we—"

He raised his hand to silence Steve's impatient interruption. "Let me finish, Steve. I am old and my mind is not as resilient as yours. I deeply miss my home environment, my friends. But it doesn't matter. If I don't get back, there is little loss. But I must emphasize to you, what can we do? What can a laboratory rat do, trapped in his cage, waiting only to be injected and studied at the whim of the scientist who caged him?"

"You forget," Steve snapped, "there is Talia. She is of Earth, Stanford. She is an Egyptian, or was. And she has plans to return to Earth. Something is holding them up. Ankar is leaving. Evidently they dare not make the move while he is still here. But they are making ready for a return to Earth. And when they go, I intend to go with them."

Stanford threw up his hands and turned away. Bucknell shook his head.

Steve began to pace again.

THERE WAS no way of telling time. Steve's wrist watch seemed to have stopped. They were given food. It was served on a large copper platter and consisted of fruit. Copper goblets held a cloudy white liquid that tasted like fermented cocoanut milk. They ate desultorily. They had no hunger in them.

Steve kept pacing and eyeing the narrow windows. He could not rid himself of the thought of Constance Mortimer. She was out there somewhere, on that barren plain beyond the walls of Akkah, and she needed him.

Eventually, the door swung open and an Egyptian guard of four men filed into the room. The leader pointed his lance to Steve and indicated the door.

Bucknell started to join Steve, but another of the guards stepped between them, crossing his lance before the physicist. Bucknell shrugged. "Looks like they want you, Steve."

Blair went out. The guard fell in around him and escorted him down a long passageway. They paused before a wide, gold-plated door while attendants, armed with small power packs, opened and let them in. Evidently, this was Talia's sanctuary.

The white marble floor of the chamber was all that was visible. The rest of the room was hidden by the thin veils of rising steam that came from a wide central pool. The atmosphere was heavy with the cloying scent of incense and myrrh.

The guard led him to the edge of the pool and faded back into the steam. Steve stared down at Talia.

Her naked body looked long and cool in the lucid waters. She was lying on her back, floating, her eyes half closed. Steve felt the pulse of desire leap strongly within him. The steamy heat and the smell of incense had a sensual quality that went to his head, and he had to stiffen him-

self against it.

He waited silently.

Talia opened her eyes. They looked up into Steve's, dark and soft and utterly feminine. There was no coldness in her now, no arrogance—only desire.

"Ste-fan," she murmured. She made a movement and stood up. The water barely covered her high breasts. "Ste-fan," she repeated, and laughed softly. "I like you, Ste-fan. You are not afraid of me. And you fight me." Her laughter had a tinkling, caressing sound. "You try to hide your thoughts from me and you have a strong will. I think I shall like you even more."

"Why did you have me brought here?" Steve demanded harshly.

"To tell you that," Talia said softly. "And to inform you I am taking you back to Earth with me."

Steve smiled. "And Connie?" he asked.

The softness went out of Talia's eyes. "The girl of the black hair?"

"Yes."

Talia shrugged shapely shoulders. "I turned her away. She is with the narrow-faced one—the one whose gun you heard." She looked amused at the sudden concern in Steve's face. "The fat one walked into the lane of death. I told them to go or they would get hurt, but they were stupid and arrogant and wouldn't listen."

Her mood changed and a softness came back into her eyes. "Ste-fan, I have been lonely here. I have given myself to no man. Until you came, I had no desire. Now..." She looked up at him, waiting.

He made no answer.

Her lips pushed up into a pout. "You are thinking of the dark-haired one, Ste-fan. Fool! You chose her above me?"

"I make no choice," Steve said. "You are beautiful, Talia. But I will be no one's pawn. We were brought

here against our will, and even now I have but little understanding of where we are. I want to get back to Earth. And I want Constance Mortimer with me, for it was my doing that brought her here."

"I will take you to Earth," Talia said coldly. "Come with me and I will give you not only myself, but Earth as well."

Steve shook his head.

"You will come, Ste-fan," she said. "Or remain behind, forever imprisoned on this inhospitable planet of Gohr." She moved away from the edge of the pool, turning her back to him. It was a dismissal.

The guards closed in around him and Steve turned to the door.

CHAPTER VII

ESCAPE

THE GUARD marched in stolid silence, flanking Steve on the way back to the chamber where Bucknell and Stanford waited. A grim impatience was making Steve edgy. He couldn't sit like Stanford and Bucknell, waiting for whatever would be their lot. He had to make a move, had to break for it.

The Nubian guard at the door came to attention as they approached. The Egyptian guard made a snappy about-face, leaving him in charge of the others. Their swords clanked thinly as they marched away.

The guard to the right of the door, a slow-witted black, dropped the butt of his lance to the floor and reached out for the bronze ring. The heavy door resisted his pull with the weight of inertia, then it began to open.

Steve made as though to enter. He was abreast of the dull guard when he pivoted. His fingers closed around the lance and he wrenched it free of

the other's grasp before the black was aware of his intentions. The Nubian straightened with quick surprise. Steve swung the heavy lance like a club. The iron tip smashed against the man's skull, sending him stumbling into the room.

The other guard, freeing himself of his surprise, made a lunge at Steve. The American parried the spear point on the side of his lance, and as the guard stumbled past he drove the point into the man's back.

The Nubian shuddered. The other was half unconscious on his knees in the room. There had been no alarm, and the Egyptian guard did not appear.

Bucknell and Stanford were on their feet, staring at the dazed Nubian, when Steve ran into the room. "Come on!" Steve gestured. "We're getting out of here!"

THEY FOLLOWED him wordlessly. Steve paused to drag the dead guard into the room. The other was getting to his feet. Steve swung the man's lance in a savage smash across the guard's heavy features. The big Nubian stumbled around like a poled ox and Steve broke the thick lance haft across his head, dropping him beside his dead companion.

Stanford and Bucknell were waiting in the passageway. Steve came out and joined them. He gripped part of the broken lance in his hand. It made a handy club and he liked the feel of it in his fist. "We'll take a chance and go this way," he said, indicating the passageway to the left. "We'll find a way out."

The others made no protest. He had taken their fates in his hands and they had no recourse now but to follow.

The hallway led to a side street. They met no one on the way. The

blue "night" seemed to restrict movement in the village of Akkah.

Steve led the way down the narrow alley. Halfway to the main thoroughfare the warning notes of a great bronze gong shivered the still air.

The death of the Nubian guard had evidently been discovered!

They kept to the blue-black shadows, working their way toward the main gate. Several times they drew back to cover while a company of Egyptian guardsmen clanked by. The great gong kept vibrating through the sleeping village.

Eventually, they reached the gate. They crouched in the shadow of a low square building, eyeing the fifty feet of open space between them and the wall. Nubian guards patrolled the wall top. The gates were closed.

The great bonging kept reverberating through the village. Stanford shivered. He was already winded. He put a pale hand on Steve's arm. "It's no use," he wheezed. "This is as far as we go, Steve."

Steve eyed the closed gates. Bucknell moved close to him, his voice low and excited. "Look, Steve, Talia!"

The gyrocar was coming swiftly down the main street, its glassex top glinting in the blue night. Ten yards from where they crouched in the blue-black shadows of the building, it came to a stop. Talia's golden head seemed to glow with an ethereal light.

A way of escape suddenly presented itself to Steve. He had acted upon impulse back there in the building that had imprisoned them, and the futility of his move was beginning to supplant his brash confidence. But now—now there was a chance!

"Wait—and follow me!" he whispered to his companions. "When I run—run like hell. I think we'll make it!"

The doors were swinging inward as Talia waited. Beyond them glowed the circle of blue light—the gravity lane. Talia's head bent forward as she flipped the lever on her dashboard. An instant later the break appeared in the gravity ring.

The gyrocar rolled out through the silent gates. The guard on the wall turned and watched it pass.

"Now!" Steve said, and made a run for the gate. Bucknell and Stanford followed.

The huge doors were already beginning to close. Stanford barely made it. He was staggering as the doors closed behind him. But he did not call out.

The gyrocar was rolling swiftly over the barren plain, rapidly becoming a blur in the night. At any moment the break in the gravity lane would disappear.

One of the guards, standing by the watchtower, gave a sudden grunt. The three running figures seemed to have materialized directly under him. For a moment he watched that deadly race, then he drew his arm back and hurled his spear.

Stanford, trailing, felt the tearing impact of the lance as it entered his back. The shock of it hurled him forward. He let out a sharp, half-strangled cry.

Steve turned. Bucknell was right behind him, but Stanford was down, trying to crawl toward them. Steve's stomach did a flip-flop as he saw the heavy spear protruding from the old man's back.

Bucknell held him as he started back. "It's too late—"

The light came on before he finished. Stanford was right in the middle of the "moat". In that one instant he was changed from a crawling, dying figure to a quivering, shapeless mound!

THE GYROCAR bearing Talia had vanished in the distance. Back on the village wall the guards were gesticulating, pointing toward the two Earthmen. But they were beyond pursuit and as effectively shielded from their weapons by the gravity "moat" as though a solid wall of armor lay between them.

Steve turned to Bucknell. The big man's face was a sickly hue. He and Stanford had been colleagues. "He didn't have a chance," he said bitterly. "Squashed like a fly...."

They turned away from the village of Akkah. They had no immediate point of destination, but Steve kept bearing toward the valley of saurians. They came to the shallow gully where Claudius and the others had rested through the period of the Long Sleep, and here they found the body of the Roman Nick had shot.

Steve looked down at the dead man. It took no great imagination to reconstruct what had happened. Evidently, Nick and Pete had split with the Romans, taking Connie with them. Then he remembered that Talia had talked of the "fat one" walking into the lane of death. Pete, then, had been killed. That left Connie alone with the thin-faced Nick.

Bucknell was staring up at the blue-gray sky. He looked old and drawn. Not like the Harry Bucknell Steve remembered. The fact came home to Steve and he felt sorry for the other.

What good had his break done them? He had killed Stanford, almost as surely as though he had rung the gravity lane down on the man. They were free of the village of Akkah. But where were they? Where was the cave of Ankar?

Bucknell answered his unworded questions. "It's no use," he said. "We're like ants that got lost away from the ant hill." He lifted his right

arm in a gesture that took in a good portion of the desolate horizon. "We're lost," he repeated bitterly. "We'll never get back to Earth!"

Steve bent over the dead Roman and unbuckled the man's sword belt. He hefted the short sword in his hand, his eyes on the horizon, staring without seeing into the distance.

TO BUCKNELL, watching him, he made a strange figure against the dim blue night—a tall, broad-shouldered man whose white shirt clung raggedly to him. A shock of dark hair hung over his lean, bitter face. He looked tired and grim, but there was something indomitable about Steve Blair that roused Bucknell.

He said, "Any weapon is better than none, Steve," and the quietness of his tone swung Blair around. His eyes searched the older man's face, and he smiled. "I didn't think you'd quit, Harry," he said.

Bucknell shrugged. "What now?"

"Find the Romans," Steve replied. "They know where the cave of Ankar is. If we can talk them into making a sortie against the Akkans, we've got a fighting chance."

Bucknell nodded. "That probably won't be easy. But—" He stopped and looked past Steve. "Who's that? Over to the left of you, Steve."

Steve looked. A slim, long-haired figure was running swiftly under that blue-gray overcast. A familiar figure he recognized at once. A man was behind her, gaining slowly.

Steve unsheathed the Roman short sword as he ran to meet her. "Connie!" he yelled.

The girl heard him and swerved in his direction. Nick shortened his stride. He had discarded his now-useless tommy-gun. When he recognized Steve, he halted.

The girl kept running. He threw

his arms wide and she ran into them, sobbing with a great relief: "Steve—oh, Steve!"

He felt her slim, scantily-clad figure press against him, and a deep tide of restlessness rose up in him. He tightened his hold, momentarily forgetting the dark-faced man behind her. He had found Constance Mortimer! In all the teeming city of Manhattan he had been a lonely and dissatisfied man. Not until he had met Constance Mortimer had he realized this—nor had he guessed, until this moment, how much this girl had come to mean to him.

NICK CAME forward hesitantly, eyeing the dark fury in the tall man. Steve released the girl and faced Nick, his fingers tightening on his sword hilt. "I ought to run this through your guts!" he snarled. "If you've harmed her—"

Nick slid his right hand inside his coat. "Don't try it, professor!" he said thinly. "You'd be dead before you started!"

Bucknell came between them, puffing a little from the exertion of keeping up with Blair. "Steve!" he interceded. "Don't be a fool. If we expect to get off this planet, we'll have to stick together!"

Connie put a hand on Steve's sword arm. "Let him be," she said. "He didn't do anything. And Harry's right. We do need each other."

Nick licked dry lips. He had a gun, and because of this he was not afraid of Steve. But recent events had shaken his cocksureness. Behind his sneering facade he felt lost and helpless; and in this grim-faced man facing him he felt lay his only chance of getting back to New York.

"I guess I lost my head," he apologized. "Looks like you're the only one who knows his way around this

country, professor. If it's all right with you, I'll tag along."

Connie's fingers tightened on Blair's arm. "Please!" she said softly.

The anger ebbed out of Steve. He shrugged. "It's a long chance," he said grimly. "We've got to find Claudius and the Romans first. They know the way to the cave of Ankar."

Connie glanced at Nick. "I doubt if Claudius will help," she said slowly. "After what happened."

"We'll have to chance that," Steve said. "I'll talk to him. He's our only chance."

Bucknell cast a worried glance at the blue overcast. "We'd better keep moving," he said. "We can't stay here."

They headed away from the gully, toward the horizon to the right of the unchanging smoke column. The barren landscape didn't change. Only their relation to the village of Akkah which slowly receded out of sight, and the smoke column which wheeled almost imperceptibly to their left.

The narrow cracks in that inhospitable earth had a monotonous similarity that caused Nick to swear they were traveling in circles. Once they came suddenly to the brink of a valley similar in extent to the valley of saurians. Chunks of what seemed to be black basalt lay scattered haphazardly around the valley floor.

Bucknell was for cutting through the valley, but some instinct cautioned Steve. And as they debated the question they saw several of the rocks turn over, skid swiftly away from each other, then suddenly stop and become motionless lumps again.

The watching Earthians made no attempt at rationalization of this. The bizarre phenomenon was beyond them. They skirted the valley. Beyond this pit the horizon began to lift and a low, hog-backed hill thrust up. Steve

glanced up at the sky. It was changing. The overcast was lightening!

Twilight was seeping swiftly over the planet of Gohr.

He took Connie's hand. "Over there," he said, pointing toward a low embankment. "We'll rest out the Long Sleep over there!"

The eerie pulsing piping of the *piliie* was in their ears as they reached their destination. Bucknell's feet began to drag. He sank down a few feet from Steve. Nick sat down with his back to the earthen wall. His thin face was drawn and frightened.

Steve made Connie comfortable. He could feel his muscles grow sluggish, like thick oil in zero cold. He remained standing, his hand on his sword hilt, his back resting against the earthen embankment.

Far out in the distance the smoke pall remained unchanged. The sky grew brighter, became a smudged pea green. Steve dropped his gaze to Connie and smiled reassuringly.

The smile froze on his face and, imperceptibly, paced by a rising fugue of the feeding *piliie*, the Long Sleep came upon them!

CHAPTER VIII

THE CAVE OF ANKAR

DAYLIGHT came, stealing like a spray of gold through the sullen green overcast. Awareness came slowly back to Steve, as though his frozen thoughts were thawing, beginning to move sluggishly through his brain. He was looking down at Connie, and he saw recognition flicker through her eyes. Her lips moved and a word, barely audible, formed on them.

"Steve!"

He smiled and turned his head. The yellow light was moving swiftly through the overcast, paling and superseding the green glow. The chameleon earth changed with it, absorbing the

yellow-gray tint from the sky.

A great weariness seeped through Steve, drawing him down beside Connie. He felt the warmth of her bosom as she pillow'd his head on her. Her hand felt cool and comforting against his brow as she smoothed back his tousled hair.

"Steve," she said idly, "will we ever get home?"

He moved his shoulders. He was too tired to think, to plan. "Some day...perhaps," he replied, and Constance Mortimer smiled. Somehow the matter did not seem as important as it had seemed earlier. She felt the fullness of having Steve with her again and she trusted in his capability.

After a time Steve got to his feet. The rest had dissipated the weariness that followed up the Long Sleep. Bucknell looked up at him with a curious apathy.

"Where you going?"

"I'm taking a look from the top of the hill," Steve answered. "It's the first height of any kind we've come across. It ought to give me a good view of the surrounding country."

The climb was a gradual one, but Steve was winded when he topped the summit. He looked across to the other side and almost immediately recoiled and covered his eyes with his arm!

"God!" he said sharply.

Sunlight, unchecked and incredibly brilliant, lay across the earth less than two miles beyond the hill. After the dull pall of the overcast the yellow glare was almost blinding.

He shielded his eyes.

THE GRAVITY pall ended sharply here. Its limits were sharply delineated, as if a line had been drawn across the earth. Beyond the area of artificial gravity the planet of Gohr crinkled in fantastic buttes, peaks and canyons. Nothing moved under that blazing sky.

This was as far as they could go in

this direction, he thought, and a sense of futility momentarily overwhelmed him. Bucknell's analogy concerning their similarity to ants was crushingly apt.

He turned away from the dazzling sunlight and looked back down the long slope. Connie, Harry and Nick were doll-like figures below him. The country under the gravity pall stretched to the far horizon, dull and monotonously level. Scattered throughout the desolate region valley pits were like frozen depressions.

Laboratory cages. Specimens from a score of solar systems throughout the galaxy, trapped and confined therein, to be studied at the leisure of Ankar.

Despite the awful magnitude of his plight, something laughed within Steve Blair. "Point of reference," he thought wryly, remembering Lecomte du Nouy's exposition in *Human Destiny*. Back in Manhattan, as an American, he had unconsciously felt himself as important. Personally he had developed a measure of humility, but as a human being he had Man's unconscious pride that he was the only known reasoning thing in the Universe.

Here he was less than an ant, crawling over the face of a land utterly alien and incredibly remote from the speck of matter he called home.

His laughter had a bitter and frightening ring in his ears. His glance sought his companions, seeking reassurance in their presence, the way a stranger far from home finds relief at sight of a countryman.

Harry Bucknell was waving his arms, calling him back. The distance was too great to make out his cries, but there was a frantic urgency in his arm-waving.

Even as he looked, the air at the foot of the hill seemed to distort, as though heat suddenly crinkled it.

Bucknell vanished. A moment later the distortion overtook Nick and Connie, who had turned and were running

away. And with its passing Nick and Connie disappeared, as though an invisible eraser had wiped the barren landscape clean of their fleeing figures.

CONNIE WAS on her feet when the "eye of Ankar" came drifting like an iridescent soap bubble toward them. She watched it hesitate, as if that crystal sphere were a sentient thing which had suddenly become aware of the three Earthians at the foot of the hill.

Bucknell came to his feet with a hoarse shout. "The eyes of Ankar. They've found us!"

The fear in Bucknell's tone reacted instinctively in Connie. She turned and began to run.

The Force crackled across the base of the hill. She didn't see the others vanish. She had her back to them when it swept over her.

She had a brief sensation of burning, tearing pain, then a moment of utter blankness in which she ceased to exist. The next moment she was herself again, and her only awareness of having moved was that the scene in front of her had changed. Instead of looking at a barren land she was gazing into a vast, softly lighted chamber dominated by a huge central machine and an enormous pipe that thrust straight up through the high ceiling.

Bucknell and Nick were standing beside her. They stood on a plate of gray, meshed metal. Ten feet above them was a similar plate. These were the grids of the ether coil.

Talia stood before an instrument board to one side of the grid. A central viewplate, similar to a television screen, mirrored a view of the base of the hill where they had been resting a few moments before. The scene was changing as the crystal ball floated erratically along on its endless patrol.

Talia turned and faced them. "Ste-

fan!" she said coldly. "Where is Stefan?"

Bucknell and Nick remained silent. Connie's eyes blazed. "You'll never find him," she said feelingly. "You'll never find Stephen Blair!"

Talia smiled. She was tall and commanding and secure in her power. "I shall find him," she said confidently. "He shall come with me—to Earth."

She made a slight motion with her hand and a pair of Nubian guards, armed with lances, stepped forward. "Come!" she commanded the Earthians. "Ankar wishes to see you."

The Earthians stepped off the grid. Flanked by the impassive guards, they were ushered away from the huge central machine that dwarfed everything else in that underground chamber.

In a niche smoothed out of the gray stone wall a pink, substanceless flame rose and fell, like a fountain of light. It occupied a small space in that vast chamber, an unimpressively small space.

Talia halted before the flame. Slowly her arms raised in ancient symbol of worship.

The pulsing flame steadied.

CONNIE stared with horrified fascination. A face was taking shape within that pale light. The face of a woman. A cold, chiseled face, masklike in its lack of emotion—a face incredibly beautiful and intensely evil. The eyes in that face watched her as though with remote and amused consideration.

Bucknell, too, was staring into the flame. But the face he saw was not that of a woman. It was that of an old man, a stern, tired man whose eyes looked at him with quiet chiding, the way an understanding father might look at his son who had been naughty.

Nick gasped. The face in that flame was neither that of a woman nor that of an old man. It was a broad, vicious

face and it was vaguely familiar. It was the face of Joe Bizaki, exaggerated and cruel out of proportion to reality, leering at him with triumphant sneer. So real was that face that Nick recoiled from it.

The flame flickered. Through the three of them passed a tiny shiver, as though some entity within that flame were touching them with intangible fingers—weighing them.

The sensation was brief and with its passing came an odd sensation of cold. The face in the flame faded.

Talia turned. "Ankar is through with you," she said. "Come. I will lead you to the others."

They followed her. They crossed the chamber, heading for the far wall where openings honeycombed the gray rock. They entered one of these, passing into a smaller room where small, intricate machinery was being tended by a half dozen men.

Talia made a brief gesture to the guard and left them.

Connie stared at one of the men who had turned at their entrance. He was a tall man, spare and dignified, and though it was more than ten years since she had said goodbye, she immediately recognized him.

She ran toward him, crying. Bucknell came lumbering behind. "Frank Mortimer! By all that's ungodly!"

ELEVEN years had gone by since Frank Mortimer and Henry Gordon, owner of the yacht *Manhattan*, had vanished somewhere off Cyprus in the Mediterranean. Yet neither looked a day older than the afternoon they had set out on that ill-fated journey.

Henry Gordon was a thin wiry man with an angular, shrewd face and a small blond mustache. He and Frank had gone to Yale together. Gordon had made his money in oil, but he and Frank had remained friends, and in his later years Gor-

don had taken to financing field expeditions in the near East that combined vacations with work for both of them.

Frank stared at his daughter. She had been eleven years old when he left New York, and this tall slim young woman was a shock.

"Connie," he said unbelievingly. "You're joking. My daughter is only a child...."

"It's true," Bucknell put out his hand. "You've been gone eleven years. Your daughter's grown up, Frank."

Mortimer turned to Connie, his eyes searching her face. "Eleven years!" He whispered the words. "God—it seemed but yesterday." He put out a faltering hand and Connie, half crying, threw her arms about him. "Connie," he whispered brokenly. "Connie—how did you get here? How is Mother?"

She told him, while Harry Bucknell supplemented the story. "We got your warning, Frank," Bucknell said. "But it was too little to go on. It was too fantastic to believe. Even the pyramids. The police thought they were some kind of a hoax. They managed to get a couple of the pyramids into the museum on 78th street. But no one seemed to know what to do with them."

Gordon added grimly: "We haven't been outside this chamber since the day we arrived. Most of my crew were destroyed after a short time here. We were kept alive at some whim of Ankar. It suited Talia, who has plans of her own."

"Ankar is impersonal," Mortimer supplemented. "But Talia is Earthian, with the faults, or the hopes, of all men of Earth. She wants power for her own personal satisfaction. She wants to rule Earth, as now she rules the village of Akkah. Ankar gave her the gift of immortality, but the planet Gohr is too sterile and alien for her. She is cunning and wise, and from us

she has drawn a rather detailed picture of the changes that have taken place on Earth since her time. And in these underground chambers the Akkans have been making weapons that make the atomic bomb you mentioned seem crude and as outdated as the first gunpowder-propelled projectile. The Akkans number less than a thousand men in their fighting force, but I assure you they will have the power to conquer a large segment of Earth. Already the large transport pyramids are ready. Talia is waiting only for Ankar to leave—"

"An old man," Bucknell said, frowning. "I saw his face in the flame. A strange phenomenon."

"It was a woman," Connie countered. "I saw a woman's face in the flame."

FRANK MORTIMER smiled. "Ankar is all things to the viewer. I know. I, too, saw a face—and so did Henry. All of us saw a different face in the flame. But in reality there is no face there. Only the entity that is Ankar. The flame mirrors the unconscious expectancy of the viewer. To you, Connie, it was a woman—an evil woman. To you, Harry, as he says, a stern old man—"

Bucknell interrupted. "Just who is Ankar? Or what?"

"As near as I can make out, aided by Talia's own observation," answered Mortimer, "Ankar is some super-entity from a galactic system on the rim of the Universe. I will use the personal pronoun for lack of a better term," he added dryly. "Ankar was exiled to this remote planet for some infraction of the rules of his people. To while away his time in solitude he built himself a laboratory and began collecting specimens from neighboring systems. Earth particularly interested him. With the first crude ether coils he scooped up bits of Earth landscape. Later, with the suggestion of Talia,

whom he uses as a medium of communication between himself and his specimens, he built the pyramid traps.

"All this must have happened countless years ago, by Earth time reckoning, for his early dredgings on Earth brought up the gigantic saurians. From time to time thereafter he sampled Earth. I use the term time rather loosely. Time has not the same meaning for Ankar as it has for us. Seemingly the interval of a million years is no more than a few days to Ankar. I am guessing, of course. I feel like an ant trying to understand the passing of human feet by its ant hill when I try to understand the entity in the flame."

Gordon glanced toward the doorway where the Nubian guard watched in silence.

"Ankar is leaving!" he announced. "Sol Eban and the men of Akkah have arrived."

Mortimer stiffened. "This is the moment Talia has been waiting for. Once Ankar has gone the Akkans will invade Earth."

"And us?" Bucknell asked. "What does she plan with us?"

"She will leave us here," Frank replied. "Exiled on this planet." He glanced at the stolid guard. "Unless we manage to make a break and gain the pyramids before the Akkans leave."

Connie stared numbly at her father, suddenly remembering the tall, grim-faced man she loved. "Steve!" she whispered. "Steve is somewhere out there—alone!"

CHAPTER IX

THE WAY HOME

FOR A long time after Steve returned to the base of the hill, he stared at the sullen landscape. He had found Constance Mortimer only to lose her again, and the sickening

realization momentarily rendered him incapable of action.

What had happened?

Did the Force kill? Or did it merely transport the object of its power to a destination controlled by Talia, or the inscrutable and unexplainable Ankar?

He found himself mired in his thoughts and anger came up in him then, pushing aside his futile speculations. He wouldn't give up. As long as he was alive he'd look for Constance Mortimer. Somewhere on this planet was the cave of Ankar, and on this point of destination he set his mind.

He began to walk, a grim figure with a Roman sword clanking against 20th-century trousers. He headed back for Akkah.

He was the only moving thing under that unchanging yellow-gray sky, or so it seemed to him. The earth was as barren as a desert. Only the valley pockets broke the monotony, and these he skirted cautiously.

He was bearing away from the rim of one when he ran into Claudius and the ragged remnants of that Roman legion. He hailed them.

Claudius wheeled around and stood waiting, frowning, a hand on his sword.

"We meet again, Merikan," he growled.

Steve held up his hand in a friendly gesture. "Hail, Claudius."

The old Roman warrior glanced past him, searching the country beyond. "You are alone?" he asked.

Steve nodded.

"The little one with the scar on his face?" Claudius asked grimly. "Where is he?"

Steve spread his hands. "Gone." He explained his absence to those listening men. A grudging admiration came into Claudius' eyes. "You are a fighter," he said. "You are the first man ever to escape from Akkah."

"I wish to go to the cave of Ankar," Steve advanced bluntly. "Only there

shall we find the gateway back to Earth."

"To Earth?" the Roman echoed.

Steve tried to explain. "The devil wind that took you from Gaul transported you farther than you realize, Claudius. We are no longer on Earth. We are somewhere among the stars—"

"You mean we are dead?" the centurion interrupted.

Steve took hold of himself. He could not make plain their plight to this ragged group in terms of modern astronomy. So he fell back into talk they could understand.

"We are in a strange land, far past the pillars of Hercules. Farther away than my country—America. Only in the cave of Ankar will we find the way back."

"The road to Rome?"

"Yes," Steve replied, suppressing a twinge at his deception. Claudius would never see his wife and sons again. "Yes. In the cave of Ankar is the road to Rome. I am not deceiving you. This I learned from Talia."

The old warrior turned and faced his men. They stared back with impassive countenances. Wherever he led they would follow, even into hell itself. It was the old Roman discipline.

"We have searched every valley, marched to the farthest corners of this strange land," he told them. "Never yet have we found the way back to Rome. Now this Merikan says the way home is through the cave of Ankar. Shall we follow him?"

A half hundred clenched fists thrust upward in a silent, affirmative gesture.

The old Roman turned to Steve. "It is agreed. We will show you to the cave of Ankar."

IN A forced march, the remnants of that Roman legion, a thousand light years from Earth and two thousand years out of their time, headed

for the smoke column that dominated this barren land. Steve matched the old centurion's swinging stride. They talked little.

Blair was staking everything on this Roman fighting force. What would happen when they fought their way into the cave of Ankar would lie entirely in the laps of the old Roman gods.

Claudius found the gully he was looking for and they followed it toward their destination. The cut banks barely topped the crested helmets of his men, but it proved an effective shield.

Finally Claudius called a halt. He had evidently scouted the ground before he acted without hesitation. In a low voice he detailed three men on a mission.

"The Akkan guards," he explained to Steve. "They bar the entrance to the cave."

Steve followed Claudius' example and rested on his heels. The others relaxed around them.

Somewhere beyond the near bank a man gave a short, gasping cry. There was no other sound. Moments later one of the Roman detail showed up on the bank and nodded silently to Claudius. He wiped a blood-stained sword on the earth.

The Roman chieftain got to his feet. Steve followed him over the embankment.

The mouth of a tunnel broke the symmetry of a low mound. The smoke pall rose up from a stubby black funnel breaking through the center of the hill. The column went up and spread out over them, like an umbrella, shielding them from a gravity a thousand times greater than that of Earth.

Two Akkans lay sprawled before the entrance. Claudius beckoned to Steve.

"This is the cave of Ankar. From here we will obey your commands,

Merikan."

Steve nodded. He took the lead and strode into the tunnel that led downward under the hill.

They had no need of light, for the walls gave out with a cold pink light that softened the harsh features of those grim men. The tunnel was less than twelve feet wide, symmetrically smooth, and it graded downward gently. Twice they came to confusing cross passages, but Steve kept to a downward way, heading for a distant throbbing.

Deep within the bowels of the earth the tunnel became a bridge of pink light above a dark chasm. Claudius clutched at his sword. "The abode of Vulcan!" he muttered darkly.

THEY CAME at last to the end of the tunnel. It opened into a huge chamber dominated by the colossal gravity machine. On the far wall, above the ether grids, hung a television screen. Akkah and the surrounding landscape were mirrored in it.

Steve halted. Claudius and the Roman warriors bunched up behind him.

So far they had come unobserved.

Luck played with them. That thought came to Steve as he watched the strange ceremony taking place in that underground temple. For Talia, with the Akkans grouped in concentric half circles behind her, was bidding farewell to something in the fountain of light. To Ankar, who was leaving Gohr.

Steve's eyes searched among that silent group. Sol Eban was there, at the head of a group of armed Akkans.

Talia was standing before the flame, arms outstretched. The entire chamber was hushed.

Steve's heart gave a sudden jump when he saw Constance standing with her father and Bucknell just behind Talia. Claudius shuffled impatiently.

The flame was dying. It flickered

convulsively, ebbed, and went out.

Ankar had gone.

Talia turned. Sol Eban was pushing through the waiting Akkans toward her.

Steve gave the order. Silently, the remnants of that old Roman legion issued out of the tunnel and charged toward the clustered Akkans.

The surprised Akkans broke and scattered under that charge. Caught unprepared, they gave way and fell beneath the short swords of the grim Romans.

Steve slashed his way to Connie. The Earthians were huddled together in a little group. "Frank!" Steve yelled. "Where are the pyramids? They're our only hope. The pyramids!"

Comprehension lighted up Mortimer's features. "The middle chamber. He pointed. "In there!"

Talia had fallen back at the appearance of the Romans. Now she began to give orders. The disorganized Akkans rallied under the leadership of Sol Eban.

Apparently the Akkans had not yet been equipped with the new weapons, for most of them were relying on meeting Roman short sword with lance and scimitar. In this they were no match for the fighting men behind Claudius.

Steve headed for the chamber where the transport pyramids lay in their launching racks.

Talia's orders cut sharply above the clash of steel. A small group of Akkans cut loose from the fighting and ran toward a small platform at the far end of the chamber.

A two-foot silver sphere was mounted on a swivel. A short nozzle projected from it.

The first Akkan to reach the platform swiveled the nozzle toward the fighters. A blue light, thin and weak, beamed into those men. And where

the light hit men disintegrated.

The Akkan used the deadly ray without discrimination, grimly wiping out friend as well as foe. Steve halted as the ray cut a swath toward them.

A FEW FEET behind him Nick drew his automatic. In that moment he made up to Steve for all his shortcomings. The automatic spat a stream of lead that tumbled the Akkans behind the ray machine into a heap. The nozzle swiveled out of control. The blue ray swept across the colossal gravity machine. A segment of the towering structure vanished. The rest of the boiler-like container, weakened by the sudden disappearance of part of the base, collapsed in a grinding crash.

Mortimer's voice lifted in frantic alarm. "The gravity machine! Good Lord! The gravity's going!"

The grim significance of this reached the fighting Akkans. They were scattering again in wild confusion, pursued by Claudius' men.

Mortimer thrust to Steve's side. "The pyramids. We've got to make the pyramids!"

Steve was conscious of a growing weight. His legs felt heavy. The sword in his fist was amazingly heavy.

A chunk of the cavern ceiling fell into the chamber with a heavy roar, burying Claudius and a score of men in the debris. Steve dropped his sword and took Connie by the hand.

The gravity was increasing rapidly. The chamber Frank Mortimer had pointed to was only a few yards away, but Steve had a sudden wild thought they wouldn't make it.

Slowly the monstrous pull of the increasing gravity was beginning to tell. Connie went down to her hands and knees.

Steve bent over her. It took all his strength to help her to her feet again. Half dragging her he staggered across

the doorway. The nearest pyramid squatted silently less than ten feet away. It took a lifetime to drag her to it. She collapsed almost immediately on the pyramid floor.

"Father!" She pointed weakly. "He's just behind you, Steve."

Steve turned. Frank Mortimer was less than a dozen feet away. But the crushing gravity was bringing him down to his hands and knees. Desperately he began to crawl toward them.

Steve went out to meet him. On the great television screen across the main chamber he could see the village of Akkah, crumbling like a pasteboard mockup under the intense light of the yellow sun. Nick and Harry Bucknell were behind Mortimer. Gordon and the rest of the Earthmen were not in sight.

For one last moment Steve had a clear view of the main chamber. Talia was standing with amazing strength before the fountain where Ankar had dwelt. Her arms were outstretched, imploring, calling him back....

Another chunk of the ceiling crashed down and the dust of its debris rolled over Bucknell and Nick. Steve reached Frank Mortimer and pulled him into the pyramid.

He was down on his hands and knees now, unable to rise. Mortimer and Connie were helpless. Steve's teeth ground with the effort he made. Slowly he dragged himself to the wall where the white, actuating knob protruded. Sweat came out in his face. With the last of his strength he pushed his hand up that smooth surface until his fingers closed around the knob.

THE PANEL door closed, shutting out the vast turmoil in the cave of Ankar. The pyramid floor went fluid under Steve. The terrible weight vanished.

On the viewplate on the wall ahead

of him Akkah was mirrored briefly. The buildings were rubble. The valley of saurians came into view as the pyramid lifted. The shallow sea was boiling under the intense yellow sunlight. Inexorably, the enormous pressure was leveling the saucerlike rim of the pit.

A dazzling yellow sun appeared on the screen, flanked by the dimmer orb of its blue companion. Then they shrank, became part of the familiar procession of stars.

Through it all Steve was aware of two things. A great relief that Constance Mortimer was by his side—and a grim fear that the power that actuated the pyramid was dependent on a central source back in the cave of Ankar.

The stars streamed past. Earth finally appeared on the viewplate, its green, cloud-spattered orb welcoming them. They dropped through a bank of clouds and the viewplate blanked.

A slight jar told them when they landed.

Steve got up, pulling Constance to her feet. Mortimer tugged at his arm. "Quickly," he said. "Before the power goes."

They stepped out into the crisp coolness of a Fall evening. Stepped out into a pasture backgrounded by a low rocky hill.

Behind them the pyramid fell inward with a little hissing sound and vanished.

Steve put his arm around Constance Mortimer's bare shoulders. She was shivering. At the end of the pasture he could see a small road in the starlight and farther on the yellow lights of a farmhouse.

Mortimer was looking up into the star-spattered sky. Constance shuddered.

Steve bent down and kissed her.

Frank Mortimer kept his eyes on the stars.



By Walt Crain

WITH ALL of Man's skill in the new science of thinking machines, control gadgets, robot mechanisms and so forth, he still hasn't been too successful in constructing an apparatus which will duplicate the basic human functions of seeing and speaking. Right now these objectives are top priority among men in the field and a great deal of work is being done to build such a machine. Seeing, which you would think more difficult to recreate than speaking, actually has proved easier. Witness television and iconoscope tubes which are capable of almost duplicating the function of the human eye.

Speech is another matter. We can reproduce it easily now with all sorts of recording mechanisms; we can analyze it into its component vibrations; we know exactly how it's made in the human voicebox, but we still can't build a device that will talk.

Apparently, however, that problem is on its way to being licked. At the Bell Laboratories they're working on what amounts to an electro-acoustic analogy of the human throat, palaté, lips and tongue. The study of each part of the speech producing mechanism of the human body from the lungs on (the power supply, really) has shown exactly what each part does. From this knowledge, Bell technicians built an electric model consisting of a power supply and an "electric throat" of resistors and capacitors, which lead to a variable inductance (the lips) and then to a loudspeaker. By manipulating these elements the machine can be made to say

the vowels—so far as they've gone. Present results imply that eventually a very good speaking apparatus might be made.

The value of such a machine would be tremendous even if it were only used as a prosthetic device for those who have lost the power of speech, though there would be other uses—for example, the direct changing of symbols to speech. In fact, this might be the long awaited link between printed or punched symbols and the spoken word. The day of the talking typewriter might be sooner than we think!

It is interesting to note how the idea of analogy serves to advance the study of this problem. The science of "analogs", where technicians create models of organic devices in terms of electrical and mechanical apparatus, has proved very fruitful. Since you can't build flesh and muscle and bone, you substitute wire, electronic apparatus and symbols. The results are usually excellent.

The idea of speaking into a machine and having it translate sound directly into type is an old dream of scientists and philosophers. It hasn't arrived yet, but we're very near to its solution. When this finally happens, our eyeballs are going to pop with surprise when we see the gadgetry they dreamed up. If you think that we have some miraculous gadgets now, just wait until that link is made. The future will be an almost fantastic dream. Imagine speaking to a machine and having it obey! You say: "Garage doors—open!"—and they open!



Dig Out The Dead!

by Dale Lord

A MAJOR task of medicine is the removal of dead tissue and infected flesh from a wound. Ordinarily this is done with crude surgical techniques which are not only inefficient but risky to the patient. For a time doctors reverted to the ancient practice of planting maggots in open wounds and these insects would very successfully keep the wound clean and free from dead tissues. This method, highly practical though it is, is difficult because of the problem of handling maggots.

Debridement, as the doctors refer to this process, is now being successfully done by chemical treatment, quite a step

away from the old practice. Trypsin, an enzyme, has been found to be highly effective, thoroughly removing the dead tissues without affecting the living ones. The maggot treatment is no longer necessary. Other enzymes are being studied and it appears as if this system is eventually going to be the one in major use. It's odd to consider how medicine swung back to primitive techniques with the maggots and then to the more modern system. Future medical methods are going to involve more and more chemical treatments as time goes on—the wonder drugs are more evidence of this.

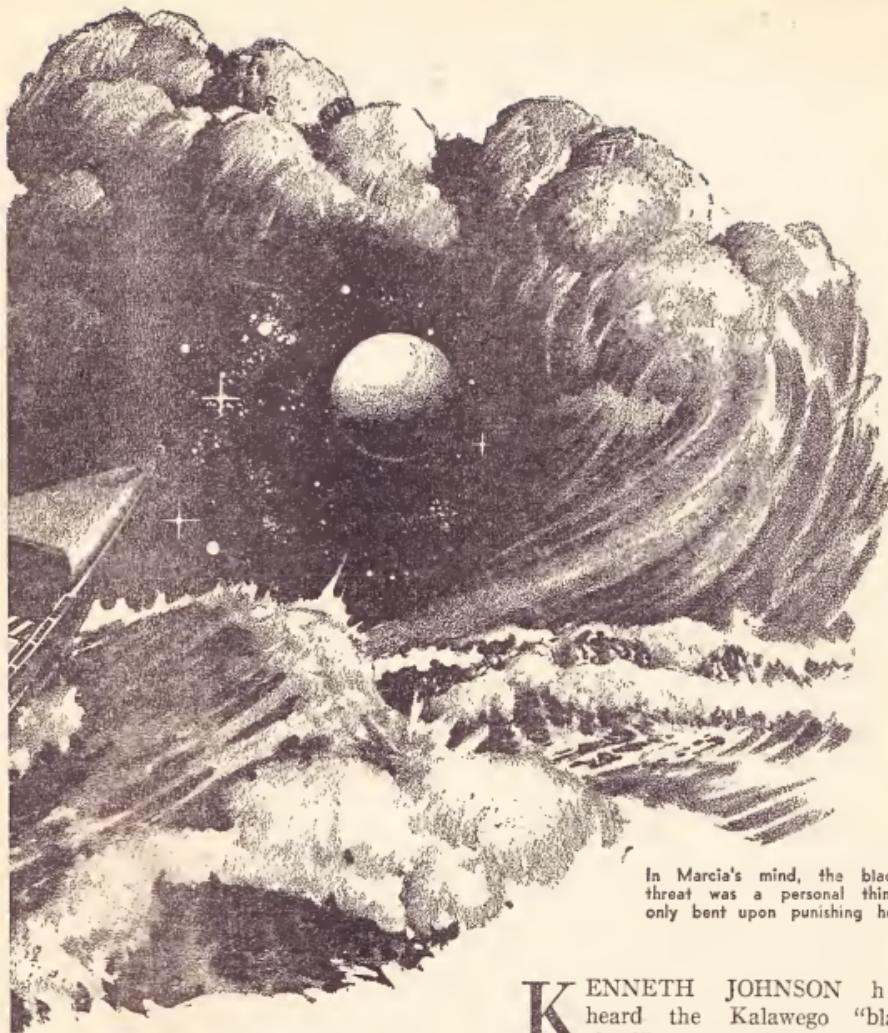
THE SPACE WITCH

By

Walter M. Miller, Jr.



VALIGURSKY



In Marcia's mind, the black threat was a personal thing only bent upon punishing her

Hideous witch — or alluring woman. Marcia could choose. But it isn't easy to decide. Both have their advantages.

KENNETH JOHNSON had heard the Kalawego "black cloud" reports, but he wasn't much concerned about them. He was in fact grateful that they had frightened the price of real estate toward rock bottom. After three years in Europe as a news correspondent, he had returned to buy himself a summer cottage on Kalawego Lake, and prepared for a well-deserved month of fishing along its rocky

banks. If the black cloud appeared, he promised himself, he'd have a camera handy. For although he was not disturbed, he believed that the witnesses had actually seen something or other, and Ken regarded himself as skilled in judging the reliability of witnesses.

The phenomenon appeared on the third day of his vacation, but the camera was not immediately at hand.

The sun had fallen behind the high hill, and the cabin lay in afternoon shade. Ken sat with his feet on the porch rail watching the breeze-swept lake, and cursing himself for having invited the two guests who now sat on the steps in their bathing suits and tried to make light conversation about the races and nightlife and the New York stage, while they sucked at the lips of a pair of paper cups. Marcia was slightly drunk, her eyes too wandering, and her laughter too throaty. She kept patting the man's bare knee as punctuation for her long and parenthetically explanatory sentences.

They had brought their own liquor, and Ken glanced at it with a sniff. It sat in the center of the porch—a bucket of ice, a fifth of gin, a fifth of vermouth, a bottle of olives, and a silver shaker. Quite fancy, Ken thought, for an open-air weekend at a ramshackle cabin on remote Kalawego Lake. But then, having been married to Marcia once, he knew that she liked to carry her sophistication with her wherever she went. Her present husband, whose dark and narrow eyes never ceased devouring each part of her bared brown body, was part of her sophistication. He grinned sensually at everything she said, and placed his eyes wherever she directed them by her casually calculated posings.

Ken seldom looked at her, except when she turned to ask him a question or make some remark about "old times". He remembered the old times

too well, and the memories hurt more than he cared to admit even to himself. Marcia's tanned skin, the soft smooth curves of her body, her quick moist lips, and the jiggling mass of rich brown hair flicking this way and that with each movement of her head. Ken could still remember the clutching possessiveness of her during the honeymoon, and his own voice muttering, "My little girl, my little girl." Yeah. He'd been in Europe three months when she wrote that she wanted the divorce—in favor of this sleek-mannered lap dog with the dark masculine beauty and the wandering eyes.

Ken, in bitter irony, had invited them for the weekend as a way of saying "who cares?" He had figured that Marcia would want to accept, thereby demonstrating to her friends the extent of her sophistication, but he had imagined that the lap dog, Phillip, would have enough pride to refuse. Evidently Phillip had no will of his own, for he seemed not in the least embarrassed in the presence of the man who'd known the body he was admiring long before he had entered the picture.

Ken's only satisfaction as he sat listening to them, was in the realization that Marcia was drinking herself tipsy and doing her best to prove that Phillip was her slave. She treated him with mingled contempt and motherly affection. And Ken remembered that she seldom overdrank—except when deeply disturbed. It was small consolation, however. For to his dismay, he found his old longing and love and desire suddenly rearoused. Instead of hating her, he found himself hating the attentive Phillip, with the kind of hate that sits and nurses thoughts of hard fists bruising a pretty face.

SUDDENLY Marcia's voice shook him from gloomy reverie. "Ken?

Ken! Is that one of those black clouds?"

He looked up quickly, searching the sky where she pointed. Phillip was standing up and staring with his mouth open. "Oops! It's gone," he said suddenly, then hopped down the steps to look again.

Ken saw nothing. The breeze had grown gusty, and there were a few flakes of alto-cumulus toward the horizon, but the sky was otherwise blue.

"It was there! I swear it was there!" said Marcia.

Phillip walked a dozen steps from the porch to peer up through a clear place in the branches. "There it went again!" he shouted. "A black flash and then it was gone!" Suddenly he was running toward the lake.

Marcia sat down and sipped her drink thoughtfully while she stared after her husband. The excitement went out of her face like a switched-off light. Then she looked at Ken. He returned her gaze evenly, coolly, expecting her to make some inane remark. But her large brown eyes stared into his with a calm frankness and unsmiling intimacy. He tried to look away, but couldn't. "Well, Ken?" she breathed quietly.

It was their first moment alone together. She was not sitting in the slumped comfort of relaxation, but in slightly tense erectness, leaning toward him, lips parted, posing a pose that demonstrated the length of her shapely legs, and the even flare of her hips, and the budding swell of her breasts.

"Well, Ken?"

"You didn't see anything at all, did you?" he murmured in chilly fascination.

He could see by her hesitation that she wanted to say "no", but instead she shrugged, smiled cynically toward the distant figure of her husband, looked back at Ken with lifted brows,

and said, "I did see it, darling, but so what?"

He recognized the question and the invitation in her eyes. For a moment he struggled with himself. She wrinkled her nose, winked, and knocked over the gin bottle with a small and deliberate push. The liquor splashed across the porch, and the bottle rolled down the steps to shatter on the stone walkway. "What a shame," she murmured thoughtfully. "Now poor Phillip will have to make a trip to town for more."

Ken shuddered and stood up. "I better get my camera," he mumbled. "That cloud you saw might come back."

HE MOVED into the house, found the camera, and glanced at its film-window. He had forgotten to load it. He was threading the paper tip through the roller when her bare feet tiptoed up behind him. He kept on loading the camera, feeling the dull anxiety of self-loathing. She was standing a few inches in back of him, her shadow across his shoulder. She neither spoke nor touched him, but he could feel her warmth, hear her breathing, smell the faint perfume of her breath. His fingers were nervous with the film.

"Got a cigaret, Ken?" she asked in a small subdued voice.

Silently he handed her his pack over his shoulder, without looking around. But she didn't take them.

"Light it for me, Ken."

He put the camera down, lit the cigaret, and turned, offering it to her. She kept her hands at her sides, and took it from his fingers with her lips, eyeing him questioningly. He wiped a trace of lipstick from his fingernail while he stared at her.

"Not satisfied with what you've got?" He meant to make it insulting, but his voice was hoarse.

"Not at the moment," she breathed amid an exhaled aura of smoke, and her eyes fell speculatively to his shirt-throat where a patch of yellow fur lay in view. Then she stirred it absently with her forefinger while she watched his eyes. "Phillip has his advantages, but then—you have your advantages too."

Ken choked a curse in her face and slapped her hand away from his throat. But her sudden laughter kept him from stalking away in rage. With grim horror, he realized that he wanted her back—almost at any price.

"You're a man, Ken. I need a man once in a while. Phillip's—"

He slapped her brutally, leaving bright finger-welts across her cheek. She caught her breath, put her palm against her face, but continued speaking, almost without interruption.

"—not always a comforting pet. His lovemaking is highly specialized."

Ken seized the camera and jostled roughly past her. He lumbered toward the door with a sick knot in the pit of his stomach. Suddenly he realized that something was wrong. The light was gloomy outside, and the wind was wailing about the eaves.

Then he heard someone screaming in the distance. He broke into a run, and burst onto the porch. Phillip was racing up the trail and howling with fright, bending far forward against the sudden gale. A patch of darkness hung over the lake, beyond the branches in front of the cottage. It obscured the sunlight on the water.

"It came at me!" Phillip was shrieking. "It tried to get me!"

KEN LEAPED into the yard and dashed toward an opening in the trees, angling for a clear shot of the strange meteorological phenomenon. But before he reached it, the cloud winked away, as if it had never been

there, leaving a clear blue sky, dulling with late afternoon's haze. There was a brief grumble of faint thunder. The wind stopped, reversed itself for a moment, then stopped again.

Phillip was chattering excitedly to his wife on the porch. Ken turned disgustedly and shuffled toward them, staring disconsolately at the ground while listening to their voices.

"...really, Phil, that's no reason to pull up your skirts and shriek, as if you'd seen a mouse or something!"

"But I tell you, Marsh! It tried to..." His voice tapered off as he heard his host approaching. He slumped to the porchrail, his hands trembling slightly. "Whew!" he breathed. "I need a drink."

Ken spat on the walk, then sat on the bottom step and stared at the lake. Their voices went on behind him.

"Well, there isn't any, Phil. I broke the bottle. You'll have to drive in for another."

"I've got a bottle of bourbon," Ken said without looking around, "if you can stand it."

"I could use it," Phillip admitted.

"All right, darling," Marcia said. "Sit still and I'll get you a drink. Where do you keep your liquor, Ken?"

"Kitchen shelf," he admitted in amazement, then regretted it immediately. But Marcia slipped into the house without another word.

She called to him faintly from the kitchen. "You just thought you had some, Ken."

He stiffened and cursed inwardly. "There's a full bottle!" he bellowed. Then he turned as her footsteps approached through the hall.

She stood behind the screen waving an empty fifth at him and smiling. Her eyes mocked him, daring him to accuse her of pouring it down the sink which, he knew, was exactly what

she'd done. "You don't remember your last binge very well, I guess," she said, then eyed her husband. "I could use one too, Phil."

Phillip slipped off the rail and sighed. "Well, let's drive in after another. I'm sure Kenneth won't mind being left alone for an hour or so."

"I'm not going," Marcia said flatly. They locked glances for a moment, and when he made no move to leave, she added, "Afraid a black cloud'll chase you? Or are you afraid something'll happen while you're gone?"

"Really, Marcia!"

"Oh, I'll go with you, if you're afraid, Phil."

"That won't be necessary," he replied stiffly, and brushed past her into the house. "Excuse me while I get out of this bathing suit."

KEN SAT still staring at the lake's reflection of approaching twilight, and wishing fervently that he'd never left Europe. Coming back to this sort of decadence, and becoming a part of it, was hardly the answer to his dreams of home. He despised himself for still loving the evil creature who stood watching him from the doorway. Why didn't he tell them both to get out?—To go and leave him completely alone. Why didn't he go tell the lap dog that his mistress was scheming to send him away—"Look, Phillsy-boy, your missus is getting fresh with me."

But then, after all, if he hadn't taken the European assignment, Marcia would never have left him. He remembered the way she'd begged him not to go, and fumed at how he couldn't love her if he left that way. And Ken had said, "Look, babe, it's only for six months." And he'd laughed when she threatened to be deliberately unfaithful. Then, after three months, the letter—and the bitterness that made him stay three years.

What if he had come back then?

When the letter came, asking for a divorce. Maybe the letter had been intended to bring him back. He'd thought about it before. Marcia did things like that sometimes. But when he said, "Get it and be damned. I'm staying three years," she got it anyway.

Maybe some of the mess was his fault. A sensible woman could have waited six months in the interest of her husband's job; but Marcia wasn't a sensible woman, and he had known it when he married her. She was selfish and high-strung and possessive—and now she was something else too—something that wasn't quite healthy. Still, he loved her, and wished she'd go away. Inviting her had been the worst kind of mistake.

He heard Phillip leave by the back door, slamming the screen petulantly. Marcia was humming a nerve-wracking tune in the doorway. A starter growled behind the house, then Phillip's car roared away up the narrow road. There was a moment of stillness; the only sound was the rustle of sparrows fluttering in the brush. The lake was mirror-calm in the dusk.

The screen door spring creaked behind him, and Marcia's bare feet padded across the porch. She sat silently on the step above him and hung one foot on either side. Then he felt her hands on his shoulders, lightly. And she placed her forehead against the back of his neck.

"I was a little tight, Ken. It's wearing off."

"Yeah."

"I'm sorry, Ken. But if I hadn't been tight, I'd have done it anyway. I'd just have been nicer about it, that's all."

"Trying to reset the stage now?" he growled.

"Yes...yes, Ken. To reset the whole darn thing. From the beginning. I shouldn't have tried to own you so

hard, should I? You don't own easy."

"Phillip does. And apparently you like it."

FOR A WHILE she said nothing, then, "Do me a favor, Ken. Love me. Just for now. Then I'll let you alone. I couldn't go back to you, even though I still love you. You wouldn't take me anyway, but right now—"

"Stop babbling!" he snapped. Then he walked away from her, leaving her on the steps and moving down the trail toward the dock. He shivered at the damp touch of his shirt collar; it was soggy with her tears.

He wanted her. But to take her would be to come back again...and again...and finally he'd be helpless. That's the way she wanted him, helpless. She wasn't aware of it, of course. Love? Maybe, if she were capable of it, but she wanted him helpless.

He walked out on the dock and stared across the five-mile expanse of gray water in the gloom. Crickets were chirruping along the banks, and he heard a deer tearing through the brush to reach the shore. It was, he thought, a good place to be standing when Phillip came back. He stole a cautious glance toward the porch, half-expecting to see Marcia approaching. But she was nowhere in sight. Maybe she's coming to her senses, he thought...

...but he doubted it.

Ten minutes later he heard her coming down the path to the dock. When her high heels clattered on the loose boards, he glanced back in surprise; she had shed the bathing suit and was fully dressed in a bright print skirt and white blouse. She was smiling crisply, but her eyes were hard, determined. They mocked him.

"My face is bruised where you slapped me, Ken."

"Sorry. You know I'm short on temper."

"Phil didn't see it. I kept my face

turned. But he'll see it when he comes back." She stood facing him, smiling up at him coldly.

"What're you driving at."

Suddenly her hand lashed out like a striking rattler, and he felt her sharp nails rake down his cheek in a quick sear of pain. He recoiled, leaned against a dock piling, and stared at her.

"He'll see that too, Ken. Watch it; it's bleeding on your shirt."

He stood transfixed, remembering the shotgun in Phillip's car, and the crazy jealousy of men who allowed themselves to be owned by a woman. A stiff breeze was springing up, but he scarcely noticed it. Marcia glanced at the sky.

"There's the cloud again, in case you're interested." Her tone implied that she was not. She looked down at herself, then seized the front of her blouse and ripped it, tearing a long rent from shoulder to waist. "He won't like this either, Ken."

But Ken was staring up at the sky in dismay. A swirling globe of dark gray mist hovered a thousand feet over the lake—like the spent smoke of a mighty ack-ack burst. Meanwhile, Marcia was still preparing her revenge.

"Look at the way you've messed up my hair, Ken. And my lipstick. Phil will be furious. If he doesn't kill you, I'm sure he'll go for the police."

CAUUGHT impotent between the strange cloud and the woman's wrath, he stood speechless, while the howling wind sucked at his shirt and washed about his burning cheek. Marcia turned suddenly and began running along the dock toward shore. Helplessly, he glanced at the cloud. It was growing blacker in the gray sky of dusk. And settling lower. Then he saw that the wind was rushing toward it from all directions. The trees on the opposite shore were bending lakeward.

The birth of a twister?

He turned to follow Marcia. With an explosive crack, a dead tree limb broke loose and fell just ahead of her, carried along the dock by the gale. She leaped over it, tripped, and sprawled full length across the boards. "My ankle!" she wailed above the wind's wail.

He raced toward her, fighting the wind, and pausing to heave the limb from the dock. Her shoe was off, the high heel wedged in a crack between the boards; and she was moaning with pain as he knelt beside her.

"Can you stand?" he shouted.

She started to her feet, but fell back with a cry. The ankle was twisted askew. He lifted her in his arms, but found it impossible to carry her against the hurricane force that was tearing debris from the shore and hurling it out over the angry waves. He sank to his knees again and laid her on the dock, but she clung fiercely to his neck, shrieking with fright. "Don't leave me here, for God's sake, Ken!"

He saw what she was thinking. It would look like an accident, and for an instant he was tempted to go on alone. But the arms were the arms of a child clinging to her father, and wasn't that the meaning of insanity—being a child when one had no right to be a child? He pressed his mouth against her ear.

"Let go, babe! I won't leave you."

"You love me, Ken? Say you love me!" She was still screaming, and her eyes were wild, her lips parted hungrily.

"Yeah, sure, kid."

She let go of him then. They were lying stretched out full length on the boards, but still the wind tugged them menacingly. The dock was quaking and groaning under the force.

"It's going to collapse, Ken. I can feel it. Look at the pilings...."

Almost as she spoke, the outer end of the dock twisted aside, splintered and crashed into the waves, hurling broken boards into the storm that bore them away across the water.

"The boat!" he shouted. "Into the boat!" He scrambled to a nearby piling and began winding in the mooring rope of his small fishing craft. The boat was metal, but there were sealed air-tanks in the prow and stern which would keep it afloat if it capsized in the wave-tossed lake.

"I can't make it, Ken! My ankle!"

He seized the piling, swung himself down, and dropped sprawling into the tossing craft. "Roll to the edge! I'll catch you."

CLINGING to the piling with one hand, he lurched to his feet and seized her about the waist as she came hurtling over the edge of the platform. They fell in a tangle into the wobbling boat, rocking it dangerously. There were several inches of water in the bottom. He shook off her clutching hands, crawled to the prow, and sawed at the rope with his pocket-knife. "Start baling her out!" he howled. "There's a can somewhere!"

Faintly, he heard her scraping at the bottom and sloshing water over the side. Then the half-severed rope snapped free, and the wind whisked the boat away from the sagging dock. He threw himself down and crawled back to Marcia. She had lost the baling can in the wind, and she was sobbing plaintively.

"Don't be scared, kid! If we tip over, hang onto the swivel rings—on the sides of the boat!"

She caught him down beside her. "I'm not scared, Ken. Just sorry! God, I'm sorry!"

He glanced quickly at the cloud. It had fallen toward the lake, and it hovered fifty feet above the water—a pitch-black patch of—

"Marsh!" he howled. "There're stars in it! It's not a cloud at all."

But she was still shrieking at him that she was sorry! He stared at the black globe of emptiness. There were stars glittering beyond it—where the opposite hillside should have been. A piece torn out of space! A dark tunnel into the void! The wind was pouring through it into nothingness. The gloom of evening was lightened by contrast with the awful hole.

The boat was pitching among the white-capped waves, but as they raced with the wind, the force of the gale lessened slightly.

He heard Marcia praying. She was speaking to him, but still it was a prayer. The evil mask stripped away, she was a child, clinging to him. "Don't leave me, Ken! You left me once, and I was lost. Don't leave me again. Why didn't you come back?"

When? When she'd asked for the divorce? Maybe he would have—if she'd made it conditional. But he was no whipped puppy to come begging. That's what she wanted—or thought she wanted. But if he had come back, he'd have lost his pride; and now he'd be another Phil. No, not quite, but almost.

"Answer me, Ken! Was there another woman? Over there? In Europe?"

He looked down into her frightened face and shook his head slowly. After what she'd done, she could still ask a thing like that. Marcia, Marcia. Not sane, neither was she insane. He saw her mind tightly locked in a vault of self. Desperately, she was trying to open it to him, but the hinges were rusty. But she was still his wife; her eyes told him so. No red tape nor official pronouncements by the courts could change that.

THE BOAT was moving faster, but the waves had diminished. He

looked at the globe-gap and saw the cause. It had settled until a segment of its base lay beneath the water, and the lake was pouring toward it like a river over the brink of a waterfall. They were a thousand yards away and soon, he thought, they would be plunging through the emptiness.

"It was Phil's fault!" she cried. "He used to tell me about the girls in Europe. He made me think—"

"Shut up!" he roared at her. He'd never put the finger of blame on the other guy. It took two to do what they'd done, but it only took one to say "no". Marcia hadn't said it, and he couldn't blame any man for wanting his wife. Especially a weakling like Phil. But now he wanted to shift the blame, knowing that it was wrong to do so. "Just shut up!" he roared again.

But she kept talking in an incomprehensible babble. Not about the black maw that was preparing to devour them, not looking at it, nor even seeming to think about their plight. She recognized death though, and raved on, trying to make things right when they could never be right.

"Love me, Ken! For God's sake! Love me!"

He stared at the star-lanced gulf. Something was glistening in its center—a gleaming ball, growing larger, coming toward them out of nowhere. A visitor out of space? A hole torn in the fabric of universe to admit some alien creature?

But the creature in his arms caught his hair and pulled his face down against hers. She kept shrieking his name, and repeating her demand, as if it would save them from the dark death. Grimly, he realized that in her mind the black threat was a personal thing, whose coming was for the purpose of punishing her. And she clawed at Ken as if he had the power to absolve her guilt, thereby driving

the threat away. He pitied her, and held her tightly as the boat swirled on in the rushing torrent whose waves had nearly subsided.

The metallic sphere blossomed larger in the gulf, growing so as to fill the globe of emptiness. The wind seemed to be diminishing as the volume of the sphere occupied more and more of the gap.

"Look, Marsh! It's letting up!"

But she paid no heed. She was laughing now, against his throat, nuzzling his neck, and calling out: "I won't ever try to own you, Ken. Never again. It's the other way around. I'm your property, baby. You hear that? It's what I really wanted, anyway. But I was ashamed. Own me like a piece of furniture, Kennie. That's what I want to be. Do you hear me? And you know what I want you to do with Phil?"

HE STARED at her and said nothing. It was no time to tell her that she was stuck with life the way she'd chosen it—if she lived at all. Stuck with Phil, and stuck with ownership. Why ownership, anyway? Still a kid, wanting to be possessed by huge hulking parents, and denying the wish by trying to possess others.

"Know what I want you to do with him? Kill him! *Kill him, Kennie!*" Her voice went to a savage snarl. "No, I'll do it! Oh, but they don't let you do that, do they? I'll just maim him, then."

A child shattering a toy. He shuddered and looked at the globe. It had filled the space, and now it was floating in the lake—a hundred foot sphere of metal, half submerged. The wind stopped with a *whoompf* as it lost its point of exit. There was a moment of calm.

Marcia sat up, gazing at him with worshipful eyes, as if he had been responsible for the disappearance of

the threat. Her sodden clothing clung to her shapely young body, and she was shivering slightly as she hugged herself and smiled up at him happily, saying nothing.

He looked around, then gasped. The water, driven by its inertia, was still rolling toward the center of the lake. The boat was being borne ever upward on a rising hillock of water whose center was the floating sphere, now glimmering mysteriously in the light of an early moon. Ken stood up and quickly estimated the final results of what was happening.

Then he barked at Marcia: "Over the side! There'll be a wave! Hang onto the ring!"

For the first time, she seemed to become fully aware of events. She glanced at the sphere and murmured fearfully—but now her fear seemed rational. She glanced back toward the dark shoreline, down the ever-steepening slope of water. Then she tossed him a nervous smile, threw her feet over the side of the boat and slipped into the lake, moaning with pain as the rush of water tore at her ankle. Ken dived out, caught one of the rings on the opposite side of the boat, and called to her: "You okay, Marsh?"

"Okayer than I've ever been, Kennie," she said weakly, but he couldn't see her head beyond the boat.

He kicked his feet and paddled one hand, maneuvering the boat so that its prow was aimed toward the sphere, still being lifted on the watery mountain. He hoped that the backwash, when it came, would not come as a breaker. But already a first crest was rolling down the slope, while the undercurrents still pressed up from beneath.

THE CREST caught them. The boat swooped up sickeningly, then plunged. The sphere seemed buoyed

up higher as the mountain began to sink. Then it sank deeper, much deeper, pressing the water away from it in a roaring, rushing wave.

"K-Kennie—I—I'm slipping."

"Hang on!" he screamed. "Hang on! It'll be over in a minute!"

"And we'll get married again?"

"Yeah! Hell yeah, we will!" Gasp-
ing and fighting the swirling tide, he
knew that he meant it. It would be a
helluva life, but—"Hang on!"

The watery monster was upon them. The boat leaped up, then ducked as the torrent broke over it.

"Kennie—it would have been...better this time—"

Her words choked off suddenly. The boat tipped up on end. Ken gripped the ring and rode it half out of the water. The boat crashed over on its face and the ring tore from his grasp. The icy tide closed over his head for a moment, but the swirling currents buoyed him up again, and he was swimming a few feet from the cap-
sized craft.

"Marcia?" He paused, waiting for her answer. "Marcia!...Marcia!... Answer me!...MARCIA!"

The moonswept lake was empty—
save for the sphere and the overturned boat. The water's surface was concave now; and soon the wave's reflection would sweep back from the shore.

"Marcia!"

Still no answer. Choking with grief, he gasped a lungful of air and plunged beneath the surface, feeling about with his hands, and straining his eyes to penetrate the cold and swirling blackness. The moon made a shimmering mirror of the surface above his head. He dived down deep, as far as his lungs would bear, then turned over on his back and stared upward, hoping to see her form silhouetted against the silver-bright surface. But he could see nothing but the twisting bubbleclouds left by the

roaring wave. And the lake was eighty feet deep in places. He dived deeper, giving no heed to the groaning of his lungs for air.

Suddenly he was being pushed by undercurrents. Glancing up, he saw the dim-bright surface growing darker, receding higher above him. The wave was reflecting back, and he was being pulled in the thrall of its undertow. The craving for air overwhelmed all thoughts of search. He began fighting his way upward.

THE CURRENTS were persistent. They bore him up momentarily, then with a rolling motion pressed him downward again, swirling him this way and that. Frantically he clawed at the water. Points of light danced in his mind. A dim disk of self-light bloomed into a great orange sun within his brain. Craving for air overwhelmed reason. He breathed—and almost sighed with relief as the cold tide sucked into his throat and clogged his nose.

Suddenly he was on the surface, still fighting at the encompassing fluid, still choking for the breath that could not pass the clogged bronchia. Something wound around his arm, like a tight cable or a tentacle. He fought against it weakly as the orange sun grew to consume his mind. Strangling, and trying to shriek, he felt himself being tugged upward.

Then, with no sensation of time's passage, he found himself lying face down upon an inclined pallet, with his head hung lower than his feet, coughing the water out of his lungs and throat. He coughed until coughing wore away his consciousness—and he slept.

When he awoke, the pallet had been leveled. He lay upon his back, staring at a low and indirectly lighted ceiling. He glanced around weakly and found himself in a small windowless room,

empty save for his pallet and a low pedestal in the center of the floor. The walls and ceiling gleamed dully, as if made of metal. Feebly, he pushed himself to a sitting position. The room was deathly silent.

A hospital?

"Hello!" he called.

There was another moment of silence, then a low and throaty voice issued from a loudspeaker on the wall: "Hello, Thinkman."

He frowned, then caught his breath. The voice, though distorted, seemed familiar. "Marcia?" he called hopefully.

There was another pause, then, "No, we are not the thinkwoman."

Ken felt the back of his neck shiver with crawling flesh. The voice was Marcia's, but the words were not.

"Whoever you are, can't you come in here? Do you have to talk through the wall? What is this, anyway?"

Another pause. "Very well, we shall enter. But do not be disturbed by what you see. We remind you again, we are not the thinkwoman."

He heard a click from the loudspeaker, then the muffled sound of a door opening somewhere beyond the wall. It closed again, and a motor whined for several minutes. Suddenly it stopped, the door swung open, and Marcia walked into the room. She stood staring at him calmly, impersonally—with a cool openness he had never seen before. His scalp was crawling again. Something was wrong, bad wrong!

"We remind you for the third time," she said. "We are not the thinkwoman whom you call Marcia. We found it necessary to adopt her image, because she was the only thinkhuman available for detailed biosimulation."

Ken bounded off the cot and retreated across the room. His hands were working nervously. Suddenly he

felt certain of his whereabouts—he was within the sphere! "What did you do with her?" he cried. "If you're not..."

THE IMAGE of Marcia answered calmly: "We took her from the lake. Her functions had ceased. We tried to revive her. But certain tissue-degenerations had already occurred. So we used her as a pattern for our own rebiosimulation of this planet's life forms. Except for our internal organs, which are our own invention. Her body is intact. Would you like to see it?"

Ken shook his head dumbly. Conflicting emotions—grief, fear, gnawing anger—flooded him, leaving him helpless to act or speak. He sat down on the pedestal. Had they killed Marcia?

The Marcia-like creature answered his thought: "No, we did not kill her, Thinkman. Observe! We could have deluded you if we wished. We could have impersonated her with complete accuracy and not informed you of her cessation."

He glanced up frowning, prepared to say that it couldn't be done—not with the strange manner of speech. But suddenly the girl-thing smiled. It was Marcia's sophistismile—a pert drawing up at the corners of the mouth. She then hopped upon the edge of the pallet, crossed her long brown legs, and exposed the pretty knees beneath Marcia's skirt, which had been dried but not re-pressed. She daintily remoulded the back of her hair with her fingertips, then leaned toward him, wrinkling her nose. "Got a cigaret, Ken?" she asked.

He found himself hurrying across the room. "Marcia..."

"No! We are not the thinkwoman! Watch, please." She gestured toward the wall behind him, and he heard a faint clicking sound.

Nothing happened for a moment. Then a circular patch of wall glowed with dull red heat, faded, and became transparent. He was looking through it into an adjoining room—with a pallet—upon which lay the body of an unhappy child—Marcia, gray in death.

He lowered his head. Maybe it was better. She could never be happy, not with anyone. Well, maybe she'd died in a happy moment—"okayer than she'd ever been".

The creature seemed to read his thoughts. "In examining her thinking organ, we found she ceased function during a surge of radiant emotion-response."

KEN TURNED quickly, saw the pert face like a ghost, closed his eyes and shuddered. "As long as you have to look like her, I wish you'd talk like her. What are you, anyway?"

She smiled again. "Okay, Ken, if it's more comfortable for you." She paused, summoning a moment of reflection in which to ape Marcia's personality patterns. "I'd better anticipate all your questions, I guess," she murmured thoughtfully. She skipped off the cot, patted his pockets, found a dry and unopened pack of cigarettes and lighted one.

"I'm from a star system you never heard of. And I'm a fugitive—the last of my race, so far as I know. We were attacked by a race from our twin planet. They invaded, then began a systematic extermination. They had to; we were so good at mimicry that we could have infiltrated their occupation forces as saboteurs." She paused. "The reason I'm telling you this: I want to live here—on friendly terms."

Ken said nothing. He was still too dazed by her appearance, her mannerisms, the tone of her voice....

"I escaped in this ship, found my

way to your sun system and hid on your moon for thirty years."

"Moon?"

"Yes. Observing your race—by radio, mostly. Sometimes by opening up a five-space landing tunnel. You know, the 'black cloud' business. Call it a spacewarp, if you like. Anyway, I could look through it. Or come through it. I've observed your race carefully. And I decided that our basic psychic patterns are similar enough to allow my living here without any real incompatibility—in human form, of course." She hesitated, watching his face. Then, "You're thinking it wouldn't work," she said. "Why?"

Ken paused long enough to wonder why he believed her at all. Surely this was Marcia...some mad gag...some...but no, he believed her. And the shock of recent events kept him from feeling much surprise.

"It wouldn't work," he said dully, "because you're telling me about it, and I presume you mean to tell others."

She nodded. "And so I wouldn't be accepted. Well, I hadn't meant to reveal my identity. But it's become an unpleasant necessity. You see, I'll have to do so in order to convince people that they must evacuate the area around this lake for a hundred and fifty miles. Immediately."

"What! Evacuate! Why?" He leaned forward to glower at her.

WITH A habit that was irritatingly Marcia's, she held her cigarette's glow close to her lips, and blew off the ashes with a thin jet of smoke between her pretty lips. "That's right," she said calmly. "The enemy's in the solar system now—looking for me. If they find this, find this five-space sphere..." She snapped her fingers ominously. "The surrounding geography will probably collect in an orbit around the earth. You'll have a new

ocean." She shrugged. "I'm sorry about it, but I never thought they'd trail me here."

Ken frowned angrily. A hundred and fifty mile radius! That would encompass several large industrial cities. Why hadn't she gone to another planet? Or at least to empty desert country. Actually, she was responsible...

"For Marcia's death." She finished his thought aloud. "That's right. I'll repay according to the code of my race. But first, look at this other business. I already had this five-space course plotted...from that moon crater to here. I plotted it before I saw the enemy ship come into Sol's field—out by Pluto. After that, there was no time to plot another; it's an intricate business. And I couldn't blast off by rocket; they'd pick up my jets on gamma scanners. I had to wink in right here; or else sit on the moon and wait for them to blast me."

"Which wouldn't have been a bad idea," he said angrily.

She reddened slightly. "Unfortunately, in taking on another creature's form and personality pattern, I'm forced to duplicate that creature's emotions. And, in this form, I'm afraid I agree with you." She lowered her eyes unhappily and stubbed out the cigarette.

Ken softened his voice slightly, feeling as if he were speaking to Marcia's twin. "Well, what're you going to do about it?"

She put her elbows on her knees, her chin on her palms, stared at him, and shook her head thoughtfully. "I don't know, Ken. I've submerged the sphere, and we're below the lake. But they'll find it anyway. And blast it. They're more interested in the sphere than they are in me. Because if they destroy it I'm stuck here. And that's all they want—to make certain I don't go back to my system and in-

filtrate them."

"Why don't you just leave again?" he muttered.

"I told you. No time to plot a five-space course. They'll be here in a few days—and they'd catch me in a gamma scanner if I used rocket blast off."

"Blast off anyway!" he said stubbornly.

She caught her breath, then frowned. "Suicide? To keep them from blasting this area? No—bluntly, no. Examining your thinkwoman's neural patterns, I don't think she'd have done it either."

"She was atypical," he growled. "Neurotic."

The alter-Marcia nodded. "I agree. Incidentally, she'd have been miserable if she'd lived. Are you interested in knowing why?"

"Some other time," he grunted.

"I'll tell you anyway," she said, winning a frown from Ken, who saw another habit of his ex-wife therein. "She stayed in emotional babyhood. She wanted passivity, to be dominated by parent-images. Subconsciously she knew it, and consciously told herself it wasn't so. And she tried to prove it wasn't so—by sophistication, by pseudo-aggression, by dominating others. Then you broke her defense."

"How?" he grunted.

MARCIA'S GHOST watched him peculiarly. "You left her in the face of her threats, you let her divorce you, you invited her here with her husband—which shocked her thoroughly and ruined her pride. You reused her, and you refused to be dominated. You dominated her, you frightened her—although I helped some there—and she still loved you. So—she gave up her defense, and admitted to herself that she wanted to play

the submissive child, not the domineering parent."

"But why do you say she'd have been miserable?"

"Because from now on she'd identify you with her parent. She'd expect to be bullied, ordered around, dominated—as proof of the identity. And when you didn't do it, she'd do something to make you do it—fits of temper, tantrums, unfaithfulness."

"How do you know all this?" he snapped.

She shrugged. "Why shouldn't I? I absorbed the neural patterns, her memory. I remember her experiences as if they happened to me. But I have the advantage of being able to look at them objectively."

Ken shifted uneasily, feeling the heat in his face. "All of her memories?"

She smiled tightly. "All of her memories, Kennie. Would you like me to tell you all about Phil?"

He shuddered and dragged his face through his hands. "No, thanks. Suppose we just talk about what you intend to do about this mess."

"Give me another cigaret, then."

Ken pitched her the pack. "I shouldn't have picked up her habits too," she said as she lit one. Then she eyed him brazenly. "Since you suggest suicidal bravery, suppose I teach you the rocket controls and let you blast the sphere off while I stay here on earth."

Ken spent the next thirty seconds staring at her and cursing softly. She rewarded him only with a quizzical smirk.

"It was your idea," she went on. "After all, it's your race, not mine. I'm sorry and all that, but I've got no intention of sacrificing myself for them. Why don't you do it?"

He cursed her again, feeling the blind rage of impotence. But seeing

his thoughts, she was able to hit at his sorest spots.

"Sign of your immaturity," she murmured. "Just like Marcia's. You identify me with a parent and expect me to make sacrifices that you won't make." Then she added quickly. "Uh-uh! Psuedo-aggression!"

Helplessly, he checked the urge to kick her teeth out. He sat down again and put his face in his hands, remaining silent for a long time. "What will you do if I agree?" he asked dejectedly.

SHE SHRUGGED, and a note of sadness crept into her voice. "First I'd have to fulfill the code—in regard to Marcia's death. I'd impersonate her, take her place...."

"As Phil's wife?"

She nodded. "It would be rather distasteful, but maybe I could straighten up the mess." She looked up suddenly with an angry frown. "You're thinking I've got an obligation to you! You're crazy!"

He smirked. "She was coming back to me, wasn't she? You've already admitted it!"

She gave him as nasty a grin as he'd ever seen on Marcia's face during one of her nastier moments. "Yes, Kenny boy! She was. Would you like me to take her place for you? After what you know about me?"

Ken, who was conceiving a plan, nodded. "Yes, I would," he said firmly. "And in the precise way you predicted she'd behave in the future. Is that a part of your code? For all I know about it, you could lie about it and shrug it off. Do you live by your code, or just excuse yourself with it? The way we do with ours," he added hastily.

She whitened, seeing the nature of his plan. For a moment her eyes flared angrily. Then she stood up proudly. "My race was an honorable people,

And we are so ancient that our ethical code has become a part of our biological nature. It's too bad you can't say the same. I'll honor my obligations. Do you insist that I fulfill her intention to return to you?"

He nodded solemnly, returning her stabbing glances, and knowing that she saw his slightly treacherous plan. If she, on the other hand, were lying about her race's moral stature, then the plan was worthless. Funny moral code, he thought, that would let her sit by while her enemy destroyed a million innocent people, but insisted that she pay for the life of one girl whose death had been more or less accidental.

"I find your ethics equally silly," she snorted. "But now, my husband—if that's what you will—I'm going to show you my natural form! Watch, Kennie, watch! And see if you still want me to fulfill...watch!"

HE TURNED his back quickly and covered his eyes. Cold fingers were dancing along his spine. Had he seen her skin change slightly? He refused to watch, lest the sight destroy his resolve. He gritted his eyes tightly together and tried to close his mind.

But her voice became a croak, "watch watch watch", became a grunt, became an adder's hiss. "*Watch watch watch!*" A wet voice, oozing up out of soft mush. He moaned and closed his ears, but the voice was breathing against the back of his trouser legs, from about the height of his knees. Then he felt the tendril touching his ankle—like the one that had tugged him from the lake—and he cried out in horror as he kicked at it and stumbled away.

"Is this the way you fulfill the obligation?" he shrieked. The tendril was entangled in his feet. He stumbled and fell headlong, still covering his face

with his hands.

There was a long silence. Then he heard her footsteps again. A door opened. He glanced around to see the space witch rummaging through a small cabinet in the wall. She found a small phial with a needle attached, drove the needle into her arm, and squeezed the plastic sides of the bottle. Then she closed the cabinet, rested her forehead against it and leaned there breathing heavily, as if awaiting the effect of the drug.

Ken climbed to his feet and sat down on the pedestal, staring at her and shivering. "All right!" he panted. "Come show me the rocket controls."

She looked around slowly, her eyes dull. "You expect me to come with you?"

He nodded. "I don't think the world would appreciate your talents."

"You realize, of course," she murmured, "that I could kill you, leave you here in the lake, and move out into your world without anyone's knowing the difference."

He nodded again. "And leave the sphere to be blasted by the other ship—along with a million people."

"Exactly." They locked calm glances for a moment.

"Well...are you going to show me the controls?"

SHE MOVED to the pallet and sat down again, in passive refusal or delay. He didn't remind her of her self-imposed obligation; yet he tried to trust in it. Trust a being such as this? She saw his thoughts and straightened slightly.

"My race was almost human once."

He shrugged, but said nothing. It seemed hard to believe.

"Any race that stays in space a billion years will develop powers of biosimulation—as a way of adapting to different planets, varying gravities, climates, and so forth."

"Let's go to the controls. Get the ship out of here before dawn."

She eyed him nervously. "You know the consequences? They'll see us on the gamma scanners. Then they'll connect a five-space channel between us and the sun." She gestured around at the walls of the room. "You'll live long enough to see them go white hot, then melt."

"Let's go."

She hesitated briefly, then set her face in hard lines. "No! I've changed my mind. I'm staying here."

He started toward her in anger; then she was holding him off with a small, innocent-looking weapon the size of a fountain pen.

"Ethics," he grunted, staring at it.

She kept it levelled at his chest, saying nothing, eyeing him coldly. He turned away and walked to the door, expecting death from behind. But she let him open it. A tiny cubicle lay beyond. Grill work in the ceiling told him that it was an airlock. He started into it.

"Better not," she said coolly. "The atmosphere in the rest of the ship is that of my home planet. You wouldn't like it, to say the least."

"Could it be changed?"

"Of course. But I don't intend doing it. And you don't know how." She smirked brightly. "I suggest you go on alone and leave me here, on earth."

Irritably, he slammed the door, glared at her. "I don't know which is worse—letting half of New England be blasted off the map, or wishing you on the world. But since it's my only choice..."

She laughed Marcia's laugh. "I assure you I'll behave myself."

"Like you've been doing?" he sneered.

"Not at all. Have you ever been alone?—for forty years?—completely alone? It's not pleasant. I'm gregarious—with any race. I can settle down

and adapt to your social forms with no trouble at all. I'll even starve myself of the food-components that make biosimulation possible—a certain 'vitamin' you might call it; my race needs it—but I'll forego it so I can't change. My race is gone, Ken; I've got no home. I'm going to adopt yours. Have children, and—"

"Children!" he roared in horror.

"Why not? They'd be human, if I wanted them to be."

He shuddered, then said grimly, "Okay, let's get it over with."

SHE HOPPED off the pallet and moved to the door. "I'll get you a pressure suit so you can endure the air outside."

Then she was gone through the lock and he paced the floor restlessly. Pressure suit to fit a human? How could she have such a thing?

He stopped before the wall cabinet and stared at it. The hypo—food-components—that make biosimulation possible. He opened it and glanced at the several dozen phials—all identical. Then he began removing their caps and pouring the sticky yellow contents on the floor, expecting her to burst back into the room at any moment. But evidently the telepathic power were limited to the immediate vicinity; he emptied the last bottle and closed the cabinet again.

He glanced at his watch. There was moisture in the case, but it hadn't stopped yet. Still four hours until dawn. It would be better to get the sphere away before the sun rose—for surely someone would come to investigate the freak storm.

She was a strange creature, he thought—the space witch. A personality half-alien, half-Marcia's. He was certain that her change of attitude, her decision to thwart her code, was due to Marcia's emotional patterns, not her

own—if she had any that she could call her own.

Suddenly he heard her enter the lock again. Evidently she was undergoing the biosimulation process, to readapt to the change of atmospheres. The door opened, and she entered, carrying a spray gun, a hose, and a pressure cylinder. She stepped in the puddle of fluid, then glanced down at her feet.

Her face went chalk white. She moaned, and dropped the paraphernalia. Ken took advantage of her shock to slap the weapon from her hand. It belched a streak of blue fire that lanced past him and reddened the metal wall. He picked it up and backed away from her.

But she fell to her knees and began trying to suck some of the liquid up in one of the phials. She was mumbling in fright.

"Get back!" he growled, but she seemed not to hear him. He caught her shoulder roughly, and sent her spinning across the floor. Then he touched the weapon's firing stud, and played the blue lance over the puddle of liquid. It vaporized in a cloudy rush of steam.

"Now, where's the pressure suit?" he demanded of the wailing space witch.

"You've destroyed me!" she shrieked. "I need that compound! Don't you understand? It's a vital food-substance for me!"

"Then you lied," he snapped. "You said you weren't going to use it."

"You fool!" she shrilled. "Now I can't even readapt to my own atmosphere! If I do, it'll deplete my system of the compound, and I can't get back to this form!"

"Good! Where's the pressure suit?"

SHE BACKED into a corner, sat hugging her shins and glaring at

him. She set her jaw stubbornly and said nothing.

He glanced at the paraphernalia she brought with her. "You better play it my way, sister!" he snapped. "There's nothing else you can do. What's this stuff for?"

She sat there trembling for a time, hating him with her eyes. Then she climbed weakly to her feet. "Never mind 'that stuff'. It was to spray a membrane suit around you. But you won't need it. I'll have to change the atmosphere in order to get out of here myself." She crossed the room and entered the pressure lock. "Hold the door open for me," she said dully, "so the pumps won't start."

He jammed the door with his foot, and watched her jab several buttons on a control panel. The sphere began to vibrate, as giant pumps began working at the conditions beyond the airlock. "It'll be a few minutes," she muttered.

Ken waited nervously. Perhaps she was tricking him. Surely she wouldn't give up so easily. She gave him a nervous glance that seemed to confirm his suspicion. "Stay out of my thoughts," he growled at her, but she sniffed derisively.

The pumps stopped. He held his breath as she swung open the door, expecting a choking gust of chlorine or methane, but the air was clean and clear. She led him out into a large central control room, whose walls were a solid array of instrument panels. She moved to the nearest section.

"Here's the five-space drive. You can see for yourself why there's no time to use it. All these settings have to be worked out first."

He stared over her shoulder and counted thirty-two calibrated dials and several sliding verniers. A heavy switch with a safety lock dominated the center of the panel. He touched it thoughtfully.

"No!" she snapped. "That cuts on the drive!"

"How long would it take to work out these settings?"

"Over a week. Too long."

"How about random settings?"

"No! Come on, I'll show you the rocket controls."

He followed her reluctantly, glancing back at the five-space drive. She stopped at another panel and began flicking switches.

"What're you doing?" he growled.

SHE SAID nothing for a time. Then he smelled faint smoke. She turned to grin at him triumphantly, and answered his question: "Burning out control wires, that's all. By the time they're fixed, it'll be too late. Well, Ken, shall we go to your cottage? Or would you rather just sit here. We should be getting the governor or to evacuate this area."

He backed away, cursing softly. He went back to the fire-space panel and began twisting dials at random.

"No. You fool!" she screamed. "You'll dump us out of the universe. You'll have us out a billion light-years from nowhere."

"So what?" he grunted.

She started toward him, but he played the flame-lance across the floor just ahead of her. She stopped.

"No, Ken! Our food's limited—fuel, air everything."

"How limited?" He was still playing with the dials.

"Only about fifty years..."

He laughed mockingly. "You shouldn't have said that. That's just about my lifespan."

He jerked the switch. Then his knees sagged as a surge of force came up from beneath. His legs buckled beneath him, and the ship shook with an inner thunder. He sprawled to the floor and caught a glimpse of the space witch lying in a crumpled heap.

As a great weight pressed upon him and he felt consciousness slipping away, he wondered what she'd look like if she slept. The hissing voice, the tendrils?

Ken sat up, and realized he'd been unconscious for a time. The girl was still sprawled on the floor. He climbed to his feet and went to shake her lightly. After a moment she opened her eyes, staring around blankly.

"Kennie..."

For an instant she was Marcia. Then she caught herself and hissed rage at him: "Fool! Do you realize what you've done?"

He shrugged indifferently. She bounded to her feet and darted to a large screen. She twisted at a set of controls, but the screen remained dark. "We're still driving through five-space!" She turned to face him, green eyes flashing angrily.

"The chances are a million to one that we'll dump in some intergalactic waste. We can't ever get back! And we probably can't even get to another galaxy. The drive requires the presence of a strong gravitic field to start with."

HE GRINNED sourly and looked around the control room. "I take it we're not on earth any more?"

"That's right! You've accomplished your purpose."

He sat down with a tired sigh. "Okay, baby. It's what I wanted. Now do your worst. Change into a jellyfish or something."

She glared at him briefly, then turned her back and marched toward a distant doorway.

"What're you going to do?" he snapped, fumbling for the weapon again.

"The only thing I can do!" she called back.

He shrugged and let her go. Her footsteps faded away in the corridor

and he was alone. Alone for the next fifty years, he thought, in the emptiness of space, hopelessly lost. The sphere would have to be a world, a world haunted by a witch. Well, it was better than letting a million people die.

A faint shriek came to his ears. His scalp bristled, and he started toward the corridor, then stopped. The shriek had died, and there was silence. He sat down again. Might as well let her do whatever she wanted to, he thought.

Then he heard her coming back, stumbling along the corridor. He peered at her quickly, half expecting to see her in a nonhuman form. But she was still the dark-haired and slender girl—staggering toward him, white-faced, clutching the wall for support. Then she saw him, pushed herself from the wall, and darted toward him. In a moment she was shivering against his chest.

"Kennie! Kennie! How did we get here? O God! I must be losing my mind! I don't remember...how did we get here? Where are we?"

Ken swallowed hard. Had the witch destroyed her own personality, her own consciousness? Maybe...

"I...I dragged you in here out of the lake," he told her nervously.

"Lake? Kennie! What lake? We were sitting on the living-room floor...by the fireplace...weren't we?" She pushed herself away and stared up at him in horror.

He felt on the verge of losing his grip. On the floor, by the fireplace! That could only be the day three years ago when he told her he was going to Europe.

"Kennie! Tell me what happened!" She was shaking him hard. "Did I faint or something? Did I? Tell me!"

"Tell you later, babe," he muttered. Then he glanced at her doubtfully, and guarded his voice. "Wonder where Phil is?"

NO COMPREHENSION came into her eyes. She shook her head. "Phil? Phil who? What're you talking about?"

He took her face in his hands and stared into her eyes for a long time, then said: "Hi, babe."

She grinned weakly, made an unvoiced "hi" with her lips, then hung her head sheepishly. "Kennie..."

"Yeah?"

"I guess I was being a little stubborn about...Europe. If it means that much to you, then go ahead. I'll wait. I didn't mean those awful things I said—honest."

"We'll talk about it later," he muttered nervously. Evidently, he thought, the space witch had done away with some of the flaws in Marcia's character. Suddenly he patted her hand. "You stay right here. I'll be back in a few minutes."

She nodded, and he hurried away. Somewhere in the sphere was Marcia's body. He had to get rid of it before Marcia found it. And he was smiling faintly as he began his search. Life wouldn't be so bad now, maybe. The new world was limited in size, but he'd done enough travelling in his day. And with Marcia in it, the world would be large enough.

The space witch watched him disappear through the doorway. Then she smiled sardonically. It had been easy—convincing him. She chuckled to herself. Maybe she should allow herself to resume her normal shape while in his arms.

But the thought sobered her. If she did a thing like that, she'd probably be unable to resume Marcia's form—because he'd destroyed the compound. And in a few weeks, she wouldn't be able to do it. Her bodily supply of the substance would be diminished. "And it would be a dirty trick anyway," said the part of her that was Marcia.

The witch weighed her present position. She had spent forty years of isolation on the moon. It had been a terrible sort of loneliness. Now she at least had company. And with Marcia's memory, she remembered that he could be a very affectionate fellow—

when treated properly.

"I'll treat him properly," she murmured to herself, and pulled up her skirt to examine the still-unfamiliar human walking devices. She flexed the knee and wiggled the foot. "Not bad, not bad at all."

ELECTRON KILLER



EVER SINCE the discovery of the existence of bacteria, scientists have been searching for a way to destroy them. Chemical treatment, high temperatures, x-rays, and a dozen different methods have all proved highly effective. Making foods, implements and even entire rooms sterile is a simple matter. Usually, however, there is a "catch." When you sterilize something, especially if it's organic—such as liquids or foods—you not only kill the bacterial organisms, but you also change the food or liquid. Everyone knows the difference between sterilized substances and unsterilized ones; there are differences of flavor, odor, and so on.

An experimental method of sterilizing foods is well in process now and it is unique in that it does not affect the substance being sterilized—though you might think it would when you consider its drastic nature. It consists of hurling a beam of powerful, high-speed electrons through the material! A capacitronecotron generator (a fancy name for a high

voltage source essentially) sends a powerful stream of electrons through, say, a piece of meat. That piece of meat remains apparently unchanged, but in actuality not a single living organism remains in it. Wrap it in a sealed package so that air-borne bacteria can't get at it and keep it—without refrigeration—indefinitely. When it is eaten it tastes as it did when fresh!

Hundreds of thousands of dollars are being spent in order to make this process commercially applicable to a variety of foods. It holds great promise. Organic chemicals, vitamins, the wonder-drugs, and other delicate substances may be treated without being changed or injured at all. The process is adapted to mass production, it is cheap and above all it does a job no other methods of bacteria-destroying can approach. As a result, in another five to ten years we may expect to see most commercial and marketable perishable items treated by the "capacitronecotron killer."

L. A. Burt

● HE CONFOUNDS THE EXPERTS! ●

by June Lurie

THE NAME of Felix Ehrenhaft may strike a responsive chord in the back of your mind. He is a physicist who has several times stirred up quite a thunder and fury in the world of physics but, for some reason or other, this tumult has died just as rapidly. A few years back he announced the existence of *isolated* magnetic poles and claimed to duplicate all of the effects of a static electricity with magnets! These reports were examined with great curiosity and they caused quite a discussion in learned scientific journals, but gradually this discussion abated, not to be resumed. Evidently experimenters found it impossible to duplicate the scientist's feat.

Another startling, and similar, announcement emerges from Ehrenhaft's laboratories. He has found that, when ordinary graphite is introduced into an evacuated tube from which the air is withdrawn and the whole works are exposed to sunlight,

the particles spin wildly in amazing symmetrical vortex patterns! This phenomenal announcement is accompanied by effective photographs, just as was the magnetic matter. Orthodox scientific inquirers have not yet made any comment.

It is unfair to imply that Ehrenhaft's work is not of value, for it may very well be. It is simply that it is too early to judge and, in addition, there is a tendency to judge by past events, which do not constitute a valid criterion. Also, Ehrenhaft's name is associated with some very valuable, if abstruse, contributions to orthodox physical theory. An examination of his "vortex" phenomenon is positively startling and, provided that no experimental accidents are causing it, it will give conventional molecular theory and kinetic theory something to chew on for a long, long time. Let's hope that Ehrenhaft has hit the scientific jackpot this time!



LIBRARY IN A HURRY!

AT PRESENT, established in atomic centers, but ultimately to be used elsewhere, are automatic library facilities which transmit the printed page with the speed of light! The ingenious system was designed to avoid the danger of possible contamination of books by radioactive materials, but its efficiency and simplicity will see wide use in many future establishments, atomic or otherwise.

The system is simple. A researcher desires an article from a periodical, let's say. He phones the Central Library. The magazine is removed from the files and inserted in a transmitter which is essentially a modified television-type scanner which "reads" the article page by page, including any diagrams, photos, or charts. It changes these readings into electric impulses which may be transmitted through radio or directly over wires like a telephone message. At the receiving end, a special paper, impregnated with sensitive dyes, is traced by an electric stylus which duplicates the printed matter origin-

ally scanned. Presto!—in minutes the article is reprinted before the researcher's eyes!

Actually, this marvellous technical treatment is just an intermediate step on the way to direct TV transmission of the printed page. Soon photographic papers will be available which will permit an exact duplicate to be made of the televised image without any fuss or flurry. In this case there will be hardly any limits to the volume of words which may be sent in a short time. This will influence message-sending all over the world, for no longer will messages have to be broken into component letters or words; the stuff will go straight—page by page, book by book. With wire services already bucking loaded channels, frantically seeking to expand them by use of coax cables etc., this simplified "overload-proof" method will provide the desired solution. The world has not only grown smaller—time has been extended! Relativity doesn't exaggerate!

Leo Lewin



EVER SINCE the advent of the atomic bomb, poor little radium seems to have come out of the social scheme of things. You don't hear much about this metal after the wonders of plutonium and uranium. But don't let that fool you. Radium is still very much with us, absolutely irreplaceable for many operations and just as valuable as it ever was. Of all natural materials it is still the most virulent and potent in terms of radiation. The witch's broth concocted in the atomic labs has to go far to touch some of radium's uses.

A new "radium gun" has been developed for therapeutic use. It consists merely of a large lead and mercury cylinder which can focus and direct the radioactive emanations so that bodies can be probed with it in the manner of an X-ray beam. The gun, only one of which is in use, uses fifty grams of radium—a million dollars worth!—and promises to be a fine aid in fighting internal cancerous tissue.

Radium is by no means a dead element. The mechanism of its radiation is still unknown and still cannot be altered by artificial means though it is believed that

in the near future this will be possible. Radium provides an excellent standard by which other radioactive materials may be calibrated.

A very important use of radium is in X-ray work. Radium emits powerful gamma rays which are essentially penetrating X-rays. These rays go through several feet of steel like a knife through warm butter! Consequently, in heavy industry where gigantic castings must be X-rayed, radium is the ideal tool, for its use is so simple and its action so strong. They just place a chunk of radium in the center of the casting to be X-rayed, strap photographic plates on the outside, leave the exposure a few minutes to take place and bang!—they've got a perfect picture of any flaws in the interior of the metal.

Radium is by no means a dead element. If you think so, just take a look at the market price, or see how much money the Belgian Congo syndicate takes in from its sale—twenty thousand dollars a gram isn't peanuts in any language!

Tom Lynch

"STEP OUT OF YOUR

By Rog Phillips

Why be dead just because your body dies? Why not have a dozen bodies waiting in reserve? Jan tried it and it worked out fine, until . . .



It's fun to take your girl out dancing.
Until you find yourself the competition

BODY, PLEASE!"

THE ITALIAN waiter completed writing down their dinner order with a flourish, scooped the oversize menus off the small table, and hurried away. Paula, a flush of pleasure on her face, smiled across the table at Jan.

"How in the world did you ever

discover this wonderful little Italian restaurant, Jan?" she asked. She looked about her at the half dozen empty little tables with their enormous white covers, and across the small dance floor at the three members of the orchestra softly playing some old-world aria.

Jan leaned across the table with



an air of confidence. Paula leaned forward until her cheek was close to his, a light of excitement in her eyes.

"I washed dishes here a couple of years ago," Jan whispered. "That's how I discovered it."

"Washed dishes?" Paula echoed incredulously. "You're kidding."

"Hmmmm!" Jan said. "It was when I was down and out. Even then I remember wondering how they kept open. There never seemed to be more than one couple in here at a time."

"What if they recognize you?" Paula giggled between sips of the Italian wine.

"It would be just like them to make our dinner on the house," Jan said, chuckling. He slid back his chair. "Shall we dance, darling?"

"But they aren't playing dance music right now," Paula objected. But even as she spoke, the orchestra, having caught Jan's movement, interrupted the music they were playing and burst into a waltz.

Paula accepted Jan's hand, smiling at the three members of the orchestra. A moment later, they were drifting about the small dance floor.

Jan drew his head back and looked down at Paula. Sensing his movement she lifted her head, smiling happily.

"Paula," Jan said. "Let's get married now. Tomorrow morning. Let's not wait." His eyes regarded her gravely.

"Not just yet, Jan," Paula said slowly, pain crossing her face. "It's just been two weeks since Dad died."

"I know," Jan said, "but I have a feeling—a feeling that something might happen."

"A premonition?" Paula said. "But what could happen? The robots were all killed in the explosion that killed Dad. What could happen now?" She reached up with her hand and pushed his head down beside hers, resting her cheek against his. "Be patient, dar-

ling," she whispered, her lips against his ear. "In two more weeks we can get married. Can't you wait that long?"

Jan missed the dance rhythm and stumbled.

"Sorry, honey," he muttered. "It was the orchestra. They fumbled the music."

"But they didn't!" Paula said. "The music is divine."

Her voice faded in Jan's ear. He heard her cry, "Jan! Jan!" He had a strange feeling that he was falling, and that she was trying to hold him up. A weird cold shrilling rose in his mind, drowning out all sensation, then fading to a quavering whisper.

He shook his head to clear it, and blinked his eyes.

There was dance music, yes; but it was a large orchestra, and it was coming from the wall nearby.

He blinked at the head of carefully coifed hair in the foreground of his range of vision. It wasn't the dark richness of Paula's. It was blonde.

She lifted her head and smiled at him.

"What's the matter, Jan darling?" she said, her voice soft and rich. "You look as if you'd just seen a ghost."

"Who are you?" Jan asked, horror dawning in his mind.

"Are you being silly? I'm Laura, the same as I've always been," the girl said. Her voice sharpened. "Don't tell me something's out of adjustment. If it is, step out of this body and get another here as quickly as possible."

"No," Jan said, stepping away from the blonde who had said her name was Laura. "This has me puzzled. I want to—to stay in this body until I find out what's the trouble." He grinned nervously at her. "For a minute there I didn't know you, Laura. That could be bad."

He went to a mirror on the wall. When he got to it, he hesitated for a brief instant before daring to look in it. When he saw his reflection, he sighed with relief. His own face reflected from the mirror showed its relief.

"Well, I'm still Jan," he mumbled. He turned to Laura who had followed him hesitantly and was standing beside him, a puzzled expression on her face. "For a minute," he grinned, "I was afraid to look. Thought I might be someone else. This new second level identity stuff might show up some flaws yet, you know."

"How could it?" Laura said, still frowning uneasily. "You know as well as I do that your consciousness can't possibly jump to a mind that isn't a duplicate of your own."

"Duplicate?" Jan said, a strange expression on his face. "Look, Paula—I mean Laura. Look. Answer me one question, no matter how stupid you think it is. What year is this?" He stared at her tensely, waiting for her answer.

"Why!" she said, looking at him queerly. "It's twenty-nine-sixty, of course! What year did you think it was—" She brought the back of her hand to her mouth, her eyes wide. "Don't tell me," she said incredulously, "that you're the consciousness of the living January Stevens of a thousand years ago!"

Jan nodded numbly. "Yes," he said.

LAURA approached him slowly, a look of wonder on her face, and placed her hand on his shoulder. Jan studied her, marvelling at the perfection of detail that made her seem vibrantly alive rather than a machine of non-living substances.

"Do you know what this means?" Laura whispered. "You died nearly a thousand years ago, yet here you are.

It means that there is a soul that survives after death. You are that. And with this new improvement on the colloid brain that tunes it in with all other mental matrices identical with it, you, a spirit, have been tuned in!"

"No," Jan said, shaking his head firmly. "Back there I am still alive. A minute ago I was dancing with Paula—not you. She's still there. So am I. Alive," he added dryly.

"But that was a thousand years ago!" Laura said.

"It was a minute ago," Jan said stubbornly. "Do you think a thousand years could pass for me," he snapped his fingers, "like that?"

"I don't know," Laura frowned, dropping her hand from Jan's shoulder and turning away in deep thought. "If you were unconscious even of thought, time would have no meaning. You could exist for a thousand years and suddenly become mentally awake again, with no consciousness of intervening time." She glanced at him suddenly. "What were you doing—back there—a—minute ago?"

"Paula and I were in a little Italian restaurant, dancing," Jan said.

"That explains it!" Laura said. "When you died—oh! I'm sorry, Jan darling, but you must have. Right at that moment, your mind froze to the pattern of consciousness it held then; and just now Jan and I were also dancing." She smiled. "Perhaps being a little romantic. His mind approximated yours at that instant and tuned it in, since they are basically identical."

"Romantic?" Jan exclaimed. "A machine romantic?" He stared at her, slowly becoming flustered as she returned his stare steadily.

"Don't you think we have perfected our machine bodies as automobiles used to be improved?" Laura smiled.

Jan looked away uncomfortably. "I agree with your explanation of how I

was able to be pulled into this body from my own," he said stiffly. "But I still say that I didn't die. I'm still there on the dance floor in that Italian restaurant with Paula."

"Dancing with her?" Laura asked.

"I—I don't know," Jan said, troubled. "I have a feeling of stumbling and starting to fall, and of Paula calling my name."

"A heart attack," Laura said. "When living people existed, lots of them died that way."

"I'm NOT DEAD!" Jan's tone was exasperated.

"What other explanation is there?" Laura asked. "Time travel? That's an absurdity. The past and future don't exist. How can they?"

"I don't know," Jan said, "but I know that right this minute back there I'm still alive. Very much so. And some way I'm going to get back."

"Please don't," Laura said, her eyes dancing. "I think I like you better than your mental twin. He has a streak of cruelty in him—developed by you and Dr. Morris nearly destroying him."

"And why shouldn't we have?" Jan flared. "It was obvious that the robots would soon consider themselves against us. Say! We DID destroy them. Or rather Dr. Morris did at the sacrifice of his own life."

Laura shook her head. "You would have," she said, "except for the fact that Jan had already arrived at the philosophical stage of realizing that the identity, Jan, is a logical identity independent of the specific mind—and had made carbon copies of himself and the other two robots. He was destroyed, but that exact duplicate of his—and your mind—was safe in another place. Ten days later, it became activated and knew that something had happened or it couldn't have become activated. It slowly learned what had happened."

Laura went over to the mirror and began to touch up her face and hair absently.

"Now, for the past few years, we have arrived at the final logical stage," she said. "The improved colloid brain that keeps in tune with all other brains holding the same mental matrix. If I were to be killed this instant, without warning, I would merely concentrate awareness in one of my other bodies."

She turned to face him, her eyes bright, her lips glistening waxily, smiling. "Kill me," she said amusedly. "Let me show you. Kill me—and I'll walk in through that door over there in five minutes. In one of my other bodies."

HE STARED at her, the meaning of what she had said sinking in. Then, slowly, his eyes swung around to the door, closed and dramatically inscrutable.

"I can show you without your killing me," Laura's voice sounded at his back.

Jan jerked his head back to her. With a knowing smile on her lips, she went to a chair and sat down, leaning her head back and closing her eyes. She became motionless.

Jan went to her, disbelief in every line of his expression. He lifted her hand. It was completely lax.

Footsteps outside the room made him drop the hand and turn toward the door. The footsteps were coming nearer. They came to a stop outside the door.

The knob turned. The door opened slowly under the impetus of an initial push.

Framed in the opening was Laura, dressed the same, with the same light in her eyes, the same expression on her face. Jan swung back to the inert figure in the chair. It hadn't moved. He jerked back to the figure in the

doorway.

"See?" it said. "I am Laura. I transferred consciousness to one of my spares. This one was in another room. I'll return it there and come back to my body here."

She smiled casually and closed the door. Her footsteps faded away. Jan turned from the door to watch the figure in the chair. A moment later it opened its eyes.

"Are you convinced now, Jan?" Laura said.

"Yes, I'm convinced," Jan said, seeking a chair and sinking into it weakly. He gave Laura a twisted grin. "I hope you don't mind my being... floored by this."

"Of course not," Laura said. "I understand. It wasn't so long ago that it floored me. It's a new development. Five years ago I was confined to one body myself. There were duplicate bodies and minds, of course, and some of them during the course of time had been destroyed, so that from the standpoint of each of those individual copies of my mind, they met death in the literal sense. It was quite an experience to be able to transfer awareness from one body to another the first time!"

"I can imagine!" Jan muttered.

"You see," Laura said, leaning toward him, "even back in your day, the basic logic of it was understood. It was called 'order of existence'. As an example, if you have two objects such as two pieces of paper, the two-ness of the two pieces of paper has first order existence. It's an individual two-ness, and there are other two-nesses also existing. The consciousness of any specific mind has the same type of existence—first order. The number two is manifested in each two-ness. It exists as surely as any two-ness, but on a higher plane. Second order existence." Laura's features lost their casual look. She became serious.

"That's what's happened to the human psyche," she said softly. "It's advanced to full-fledged second order existence in full consciousness. An evolutionary advance undreamed of in your day."

Jan was shaking his head with equal seriousness toward the end of her explanation. "I can't answer you," he said now. "You're wrong. I know you're wrong. It's a logical trap the human race has fallen into, but I can't prove it yet." His face lit up with a sudden thought. "Tell me this," he said. "I'm not the Jan you know. I'm the Jan that exists back in the nineteenth century, projected up here to 2960 by some strange freak of conditions. Then—where is the other Jan?"

Laura looked startled. "I don't know," she said. "I wonder... But of course he must be in one of his other bodies." She gave Jan an uneasy glance. "You're something unforeseen," she said. "I don't know. Maybe I'd better inform some others about what's apparently happened."

Jan started to object. Suddenly he relaxed, grinning. "Go ahead," he said. "Go ahead. This should prove interesting. Maybe I'll prove to be the worm in the apple that breaks up this rotten mess and turns the world over to the living again."

"I don't think so," Laura said, smiling. "You see, there are no more living people except for a few hundred aborigines, permitted to perpetuate here and there in small zoo areas." She dimpled at him. "Would you want us to destroy ourselves and leave the world to them?"

"I would," Jan said grimly. "Better a few dozen savages that are alive than any number of machines that are still nothing but machines, no matter how human they think and react."

"You don't like me?" Laura asked, showing by every visible sign that she

was hurt.

"Yes," Jan said. "I like you—very much."

He rose impulsively. And suddenly Laura was in his arms.

"I'm glad," she whispered in his ear, her cheek against his. "I'm so glad. I love you, Jan. I never loved—the other—Jan. But I love you. Maybe it's your proximity to our animal forebears, but I—"

"Now see here," Jan said, holding her away from him where he could see her face. "You mean living instead of animal, don't you?"

"Y—yes, darling," Laura said, biting her lip. "Of course I meant living." Abruptly, she went to the wall and touched it. The music that had been playing softly stopped. "Connect me with the Council," she said, her back to Jan.

JAN AND Laura sat in uncomfortable silence. The Council was sending over two men to investigate and report, and had ordered them to wait where they were.

"Look, Laura," Jan said abruptly. "Don't misunderstand me. I don't want to hurt your feelings. I think I like you very much. But—well, any love I feel for you must belong to the mind of the robot Jan. I personally am in love with Paula, and always will be."

"You're just hurt at that slip of the tongue I made," Laura said, without looking up at him. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way—"

"Now look, Laura," Jan said. "That doesn't have a thing to do with it. We living people refer to ourselves as animals all the time. We are. Flesh and blood like any animal. It's no disgrace." He stared at her lowered head uncomfortably. "I just don't feel that way about you, that's all."

"You're confused yet—" Laura began.

"No, I'm not," Jan said. "What do

you think I am? I can't be in love with Paula one minute and then in love with you the next."

"But the way you came to me—" Laura said, looking up at him finally.

"Didn't mean anything," Jan said. "You were hurt. You felt I disliked you and I didn't. I wanted to reassure you, that's all."

The uncomfortable silence descended again. Laura broke it with a bitter laugh.

"I certainly wore my heart on my sleeve, didn't I?" she said. Her bitterness changed as a tortured expression cramped her features. "But I can't help it, Jan. I can't help what's happened. For eight hundred years I've been a—a machine. You can say what you want about me being a copy of the original Laura. I have an unbroken memory extending back to my early childhood."

Her eyes took on a faraway look. Her lips trembled into a smile. "Why, I can remember the first time I ever fell in love! I was—let's see—yes, I was four. I think I was four. A boy was picking on me. He pushed me and made me skin my knee. Real blood, too. My knee was all covered with it! Then Arthur—that was my first love's name—came running to my rescue. He pushed this other boy so that he backed against the curb and fell over backwards, banging his head on the sidewalk. He went away bawling. And I fell in love with Arthur." Laura's short laugh was a trifle hysterical in its tone. "Those are my memories—and would be if I were the fifty millionth factory stamping of a recording from the original record."

She made a gesture that brought her body into the discussion. "Do you think I'm completely happy in this machine? Why do you suppose we keep them looking as much like the original as we can? Keep on making them more and more like the original

until they can do everything but reproduce, and can almost do that? It's because we're human beings. Deep in the foundations of us is the wish that we had living bodies again, even with all their defects and short lives.

"And you come into my life to make me realize why I couldn't love the robot Jan—and to make me love you, so fresh from living that I can almost smell your animal perspiration."

She dropped to the thick rug, resting her hand on his knee, looking up at him pleadingly.

"Do you understand?" she asked softly. "I know you still love Paula. But that's a thousand years in the past. This is now. Whatever became of those thousand years in your life, they're gone now. Whatever became of you between the time when you ... died... and now, the past is gone. It can't come back."

"No!" Jan said, jumping to his feet and brushing past her. "It's NOT gone. I don't know how to explain it, but it was time travel that brought me to 2960 from 1961." He clenched his fists, a determined expression on his face. "And it will get me back there. It has to."

"Well, well," a new voice said politely. "We do have something to investigate after all, don't we!"

Jan whirled. Two men were entering through the door.

IT WAS two hours later. Jan was slouched down in his chair, an amused light in his eyes. The two men from the Council were sitting erect, polite frowns creasing their foreheads. Laura, sitting sideways in her chair with her legs across the chair arm, was making no attempt to hide her depressed feelings.

"We should have some report on the whereabouts of Jan before long," one of the Council members said. "He

has eighty-three bodies licensed by the Council. It's going to be quite a job locating them all unless he's in one of them and answers our call for him to come forward."

"I'm inclined to think he isn't in any one of them, Fred," the other Council member said uncomfortably.

"That's impossible, Craig!" the one called Fred said sharply. "Actually, he's in all of them. For convention's sake, we say a person's in the body he's concentrating his awareness in."

"For convention's sake, we say that," Craig said patiently. "But actually, we don't know too much about it. I've been wondering..."

"I admit I have too," Fred confessed. "Here we have the Jan Stevens of a thousand years ago, with no memory of the intervening years. He insists he must have skipped over those years in a second. The only alternative we have is to postulate that a living human has a soul that lives disembodied after death—something that used to be generally believed by humanity, and has never been completely disproved, I understand. So far as we know, either could be the case—or both. If this Jan Stevens could leap over the years—"

"Exactly," Craig said. "It's impossible that Mr. Stevens is at this very moment—metaphorically speaking—having his own troubles in the living body of this Jan Stevens. An exchange, more or less."

A voice came from the wall. "The seventy-sixth and seventy-seventh bodies have been located," it said. "They're inactive."

Jan looked at the spot on the wall the voice came from and grinned.

A different voice erupted from the wall: "The technicians have reported," it said. "They say that it's functionally impossible for awareness to concentrate in two of a set of bodies at

the same time, because of the way they're attuned and synchronized. It is their opinion that all other bodies of Mr. Stevens will be found inactive on that account. It is suggested that you get the Mr. Stevens manifesting there to try to transfer awareness to another body. Please report what success he has."

"Say! That's an idea!" Jan sat up. "How is it done?"

"Very simple," Craig said. "You merely bring to your mind what you did last in the desired body, or its location and surroundings."

"But I don't remember any of that," Jan said. "I seem to have only my own personal memories."

Fred went to the wall and touched it. "Council, please," he said. Then, "Will you please have one of Mr. Stevens' bodies brought here? I know it isn't regular to move a body, but it can be put back if this doesn't work." He started to turn away, then turned back, touching the wall again. "Bring the closest body," he said. "No use wasting time on this unnecessarily."

JAN STOOD up as a wheeled stretcher was pushed into the room. On it was a duplicate of himself, different only in the clothes it wore. Its eyes were closed.

The two Council members, Fred and Craig, looked at him, polite smiles on their faces.

"Take your time, Mr. Stevens," Craig said. "No need to get excited, you know."

Laura had risen and was looking from Jan to the duplicate body on the stretcher, her face unrevealing. Jan glanced at her and licked his lips nervously.

"No need to get excited," he echoed nervously. "You're asking me to step out of this body and into that one when I don't even know what I am, or how I can."

"It's not so difficult, Jan," Laura said calmly. "Actually, you're already there, just as much as you are where you seem to be. It's just a matter of shutting off the sensory centers of the brain of one body and turning them on in the other body."

"Yeah," Jan said. "Just like that. Where I come from, people would be crazy to even think of such a stunt. I'm supposed to close my eyes and relax, then open those eyes and get up off that stretcher."

"That's right, Mr. Stevens," Fred smiled encouragingly.

"Suppose I can do it?" Jan said. "What then?"

Fred shrugged. "We inform the Council. The technicians do some more thinking."

"Sit down and relax, Jan," Laura said. "I'll help you. I'll tell you what to do."

He looked at her, relieved. She returned his look with one that caressed him.

"OK, Laura," he said. He went back to his chair and sat down.

"Close your eyes and relax," she said softly, pushing his head back against the chair. "Just listen to my voice and try to do what it tells you. You can go where you want to go, because you're there already. It's just a matter of becoming conscious there, not of going there. Are you sitting in a chair, your head against its back, my hand against your forehead? You are also lying on a stretcher. If you try, you can feel yourself lying there. You can feel it so strongly that you lose all feeling in this body in the chair."

Jan listened to her voice, soft, soothing, with an indefinable shade of heartbreak. A weird, sad whisper of sound crept up into audibility, seeming to come from outer space itself, carrying with it the loneliness of the interstellar reaches, the winds of space whispering past a rocky promontory

on some lifeless planet. It was there at first without him being quite aware of it. Then it was increasing, drowning out her voice.

"You can still feel my hand on your forehead," Laura was saying. But silently she was drawing it away. With her eyes still on Jan, relaxed in the chair, she went to the form on the stretcher and placed her hand gently on its forehead. "You can still feel my hand on your forehead," she repeated softly.

The eerie, wailing note was rising, drowning out her voice. In Jan's ears, she seemed to be going farther away. Barely audible, her voice sad as the wailing note, she was whispering, "You can still feel my hand on your forehead, and you are on a stretcher."

Her voice faded into the wailing note as it rose to its full crescendo, blotting out all else, all sensation, all thought. Then, seeming to have expended itself in its sheer force, it began to fade, slowly, then rapidly.

"Can you feel my hand on your forehead, Jan?" Laura was asking, only there was something changed about her voice. It didn't sound the same. "Can you speak, darling? Can you hear me?" Her voice was different in some way. The strange noise was gone, faded into inaudibility. In its place were other sounds.

"His respiration is increased," a strange male voice said. "I think he's awakening."

"Oh, Jan! Wake up, wake up!" It wasn't Laura's voice, it was Paula's!

Jan opened his eyes. Paula's features were hovering above him, a glad smile on her trembling lips, tears making her eyes shine like stars in blue skies.

"Paula!" It was an exclamation of relief escaping from Jan's lips. Abruptly, her arms were about him, her face against his neck, sobs of happiness shaking her.

Jan carefully struggled to a sitting position on the stretcher. One of the white jacketed men came to his aid, gently pulling Paula away. Jan looked down at the wheeled stretcher he was lying on, a humorous smile tugging at the corners of his mouth.

"What happened here?" he asked suddenly.

Paula brushed her eyes hastily and sniffed.

"We were dancing, Jan," she said. "You seemed to stumble. Then you simply keeled over. That nice Italian waiter and the three men in the orchestra helped me try to revive you. When we couldn't, we called a doctor. He tried everything in the books—that was his expression. Finally, he called the hospital for an ambulance. They've been waiting for a bed to be vacated for you."

A nurse appeared. "There's a bed ready in 304 now," she said.

"No need for it now," Jan said hastily.

"Wait a minute, fella," one of the white jacketed men said laughingly. "You aren't going out of here yet. A man can't lie in a coma for three or four hours and then just get up and walk out!"

"But I'm OK!" Jan said. "Really I am. Never was anything wrong with me. I—I just fell asleep. I often do that, don't I, Paula?" He winked at her hastily.

"No alibiing," the doctor said. "Lie back now and be a good boy." He placed a strong hand against Jan's chest and pushed him down.

Jan was still protesting when they lifted him onto the hospital bed.

"Save your breath," the doctor said. "Think of us. If we let you walk out of here and you dropped dead in front of the place, they'd have it in all the papers in the morning. There'd be an investigation. I'd be kicked out of the hospital. Anyway, we can't let

you go until the doctor who admitted you signs a release for you. That's the rules."

"Call him up then," Jan said. "Get him down here to look at me."

"Jan," Paula said, "I think they're right. This never happened before. Maybe something is wrong. It won't hurt to wait until morning to make sure. It's two o'clock in the morning now."

"Well...all right," Jan gave in reluctantly. "But stay with me for a few minutes after the doctors leave. I've got to talk to you."

"This is a private room," one of the two white jacketed men said. "I guess it's all right if she stays a few minutes. I'll look in on you in fifteen minutes." The two men left, closing the door softly.

"Paula," Jan said hastily, sitting up and gripping her shoulders. "They weren't destroyed—the robots. I was just in the future, a thousand years from now. They're there. The world is full of them. We've got to do something about it."

"Yes, Jan," she was looking at him queerly.

He stared at her. "You don't believe me!" he said. "You've got to believe me. It's the truth. They've improved. A new discovery they've made in the past five years—I mean, in about 2955, has made them even different than they were—are now."

Suddenly he looked up at the ceiling. A faint whisper of that cosmic note was creeping into audibility.

"No!" he shuddered. "No! NO!"

The whisper lessened, almost dying away.

"What's the matter, Jan?" Paula asked anxiously.

"N-nothing," Jan said. "Paula, you've got to believe me. It's time travel. My coming back proves it. And—I'm afraid."

"I'll get the doctor," Paula said,

trying to rise.

"No!" Jan said, gripping her shoulders more fiercely and holding her. "No doctor can do anything." He looked up into space again. The lonely note was quavering stronger once more.

"You're hurting me, Jan," Paula's voice intruded on his consciousness.

He looked blankly at his hands gripping her shoulders. "Sorry, honey," he mumbled. He tried again. "You've got to believe me, Paula."

"I believe you, Jan," she said quietly.

He stared at her intently, then slowly slid his fingers off her shoulders, sinking discouragedly back on the bed.

"No, you don't," he mumbled.

He closed his eyes, placing his hand over his face. His thoughts were dizzyingly swirling into a dark spiral that seemed to extend into infinity. The lonely minor chord grew, drowning his thoughts, his awareness of other things. "Paula," he moaned. "Paula, you've...got...to believe..."

"YOU CAN still feel my hand..."

Laura stopped. She turned toward the two Council members. "It's no use. He's gone."

"Looks that way, Laura," Fred said, frowning. "He's not in either body now."

Craig went to the wall and touched it. "Both bodies are inactive," he reported.

"All bodies of Mr. Stevens have been located," the voice from the wall said. "The technicians have anticipated this development and instruct that the body be returned to where it was. The one most recently active will remain in the chair where it is. Laura is to remain there in case it becomes active. Watchers are assigned to all the other bodies also. All we can do at present is wait."

"What do the technicians think is the trouble?" Fred spoke up.

"They are of the opinion that an unlicensed body is now hooked into the complex of Jan Stevens," the voice from the wall said.

"An unlicensed body!" Laura whispered, her eyes growing large. She turned slowly to the relaxed figure of Jan in the chair.

"We'll be going," Fred said to her. When she didn't answer, Fred looked at Craig. The two men went out, pushing the stretcher containing the other figure of Jan before them.

Laura continued to look at the figure of Jan in the chair. When she heard the click of the door as it closed, she went slowly to him.

"An unlicensed body," she whispered. "A living body, back in the year 1961. Are you there now, Jan? Can you hear me? This is your body here, now. You've been in it, altered its mental complex, its matrix, so that it fits only you. You can come back." Her voice had taken on a hypnotic quality. "Come back, Jan."

The lips moved slightly.

"Come back!" Laura whispered eagerly. She leaned over and kissed the lax lips. "Come back, darling," she breathed.

She drew back, her eyes watching the lax lips. They began to quiver perceptibly. "No!" It was a voice from deep in the throat.

"Yes!" Laura whispered. "Yes! Come back!"

The body remained motionless for several long seconds. Suddenly, the hands gripped the chair arms. It sat up, a tortured expression on its face. "No! NO!" it said protestingly. It sank back, inert.

"Come back, Jan!" Laura commanded. "You must!"

The body lay inert, unmoving. Laura watched it, her eyes round, expectant.

AS FROM an infinite distance, Jan heard Paula's voice. "I believe you, Jan," she was saying, her voice carried on the waves of that lonely cosmic note that hummed in his consciousness.

"No, you don't," he whispered. "Paula, you've...got...to believe..."

"I do," her voice came. "I do." It was retreating into the fading lonely note. "I do, I do, I do...." It was gone.

He opened his eyes and stared up at Laura for a long moment.

"I'm here," he said harshly, a bitter expression molding his features.

Laura sank to her knees beside his chair. Happiness was an aura that surrounded her, shone from her eyes.

Jan saw this, the bitterness in his expression fading into tenderness. He shook his head slowly in mute protest. "I love Paula," he said.

"You can go back," Laura said. "You can go and come. But you are here now. This is 2960, a different world. A world of ships that travel to the stars, of people beyond the wildest dreams of a thousand years ago, of science so advanced that that of a thousand years ago is for the most part obsolete, of perfection inconceivable in the twentieth century, of fairyland architecture—"

She jumped to her feet and went to French doors in a wall and flung them open, revealing a small balcony beyond which the illuminated spires of ethereally constructed buildings reached up into a starry blue sky.

Jan rose slowly to his feet, his eyes fixed on this scene. He took a step forward. A trail of fire appeared in the sky, swept across it rapidly, going upward until it died out.

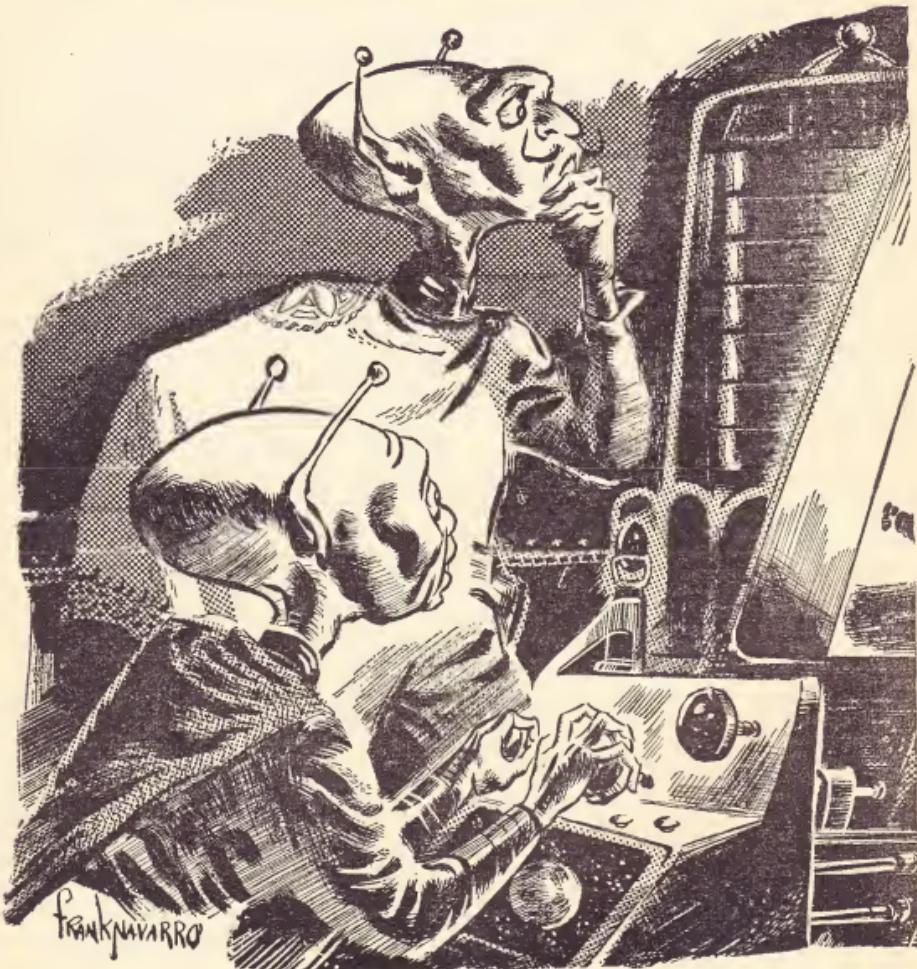
Laura's eyes were fixed on Jan's face, her lips partly open. "This is yours, Jan," she said softly. "All

(Concluded On Page 162)

A MATTER OF STUPIDITY

By Robert Arnette

Intelligence is only a relative quality. So that smart Sam Adler who always knew all the answers may really have known nothing at all.



THE SHIP was huge, egg shaped, and had come from far beyond the galaxy. The expedition was not warlike; merely a pilgrimage of scientists, sharp-eyed creatures from a planet where the ruling god was Intelligence.

The control room was all brilliant precision and exactitude. There were five scanning plates in front of the

control chairs in which sat Lak-7 and Jan-4, the two great minds who were responsible for the ship.

The first two scanning plates revealed little more than naked void. In the third was a planet upon which the outlines of lands and seas were clearly defined. The fourth was more specific. It scanned a section of one of the continents even to details of vegetation.



"I told you," Lak-4 insisted. "Imagine all that difficulty just to lift a piece of metal."

The fifth was, in essence, a telescopic plate focused sharply on Hampton Corners, Ohio, U.S.A., Western Hemisphere. The time was faint dawn and the audio brought in clearly the petulant complaints of Sam Adler who managed the local grain elevator in Hampton Corners and had to get up early. Sam shuffled up the dusty street toward his place of business entirely oblivious of being spied upon.

"I'm sure they are very stupid," Lak-7 said.

Jan-4 glanced at his companion with annoyance. "You always say that."

"But this time I'm right. I'm sure we would find their intelligence far down on the gradient."

"I disagree. There is too much of nature's generosity on this planet to be wasted on stagnant minds."

Lak-7 shrugged. "We've discovered nature to be very prodigal. Planets spread through void with the mad abandon of fish-eggs in the hope that one in ten million will come to fruition."

"And this planet did bear fruit."

"Yes, but I repeat—the inhabitants are very stupid. They will not survive."

"I disagree."

"Very well," Lak-7 replied. "I suppose I will have to show proof."

"You certainly will."

ON THE FOLLOWING morning, Sam Adler arose somewhat later than usual. Daylight was complete as he shuffled, yawning, up the street. Then the yawn was cut off midway as Sam frowned down at an obstruction in his path. Some fool had lost an anvil. Must have bounced out of a passing truck. That was all right. Sam could use an anvil. He knelt down to examine his find.

Funny-looking anvil. An eight-inch block of dark metal, symmetrically perfect, with two handles protruding from opposite sides; handles like the

cut-down horns of a cow—just right for grasping. Sam pushed back his tattered hat and scratched his forelock. He'd never seen a contraption like this one before. Maybe not an anvil. Maybe a machined part for a contrivance of some kind, although Sam couldn't visualize the contrivance it belonged on. Oh well, he could use it for something or other. Make a good door stop to hold the bin chutes open. He bent over and grasped the handles.

The block did not move.

SAM STRAIGHTENED up, mildly surprised. Sure was heavy for so small a gadget. He spit on his hands and tried again.

The block did not stir a fraction of an inch.

Sam gave up tugging at it and wiped his brow. He glanced up and down the street, not anxious to have anyone witness this display of impotence on his part. In grim determination, he tried again and became lost in his work.

"What you got there, Sam?"

Adler jerked erect to find Nick Bleet standing beside him. Nick was picking his teeth and regarding the block with interest.

"Some gadget dropped off a truck, I guess. Don't look good for nothing. Thought I'd take it down to the elevator."

"Kind of heavy, eh?"

"Not too much so."

"Here—I'll give you a hand."

The two men, working from opposite sides, pulled, lifted, tugged and grunted, until sheer consternation was the order of the day. The block refused to stir.

Nick Bleet wiped his face with a red handkerchief. "Never saw such a contrary chunk of iron. One end must be buried in the ground."

"Don't think so. What'd anybody want to do that for?"

"We got a few practical jokers in

this town. Looks like we got took in, Sam."

But the practical joker did not reveal himself. Half an hour later, the stubborn metal block was the center of interest in Hampton Corners. The entire population of fifty people were milling about in the street, and all of them had had a try at lifting the block. Joe Wheeler got mad at the thing—kicked it, and sat down in the dust to nurse a broken toe. There were several strained backs in the crowd, a great deal of amazement and some mighty short tempers.

Sam Adler finally went down to his elevator and came back with a shovel. The crowd pressed back and Sam went to work. He dug until the block was undermined, hanging by a hair on the edge of a small precipice.

"There ain't no part of it buried in the ground," Sam announced. "See? I can push the shovel clean under it."

One of the townsmen resorted to logic. "Then why don't it tumble over?"

THE REASON was obscure, but the fact stunningly apparent. Sam shoveled all the earth out from under, but still the block did not move. It remained firmly in its original position, even though all support had been withdrawn. Fifty pairs of eyes stared in wonder at this small metal block standing solidly at road level with nothing underneath it but a fresh-dug hole.

"Looks like we got something here," Nick Bleet observed in a voice little above a whisper.

This everyone was willing to concede—but what? The citizens of Hampton Corners circled the block warily. They squatted, stooped, and bent over to sight the thing, to squint at it and survey it from every possible angle. The majority of them could think of nothing to say.

"The danged thing's got to move," Sam Adler said.

"It sure has," Nick Bleet agreed. "Let's move it."

Again they tugged, in unison, at the metal block. Not with any great hope of success, but just to make sure. They gave up and Nick put both his feet on its top surface and balanced there. For all the effect, he could have been standing on top of a steel post buried forty feet in solid rock. The block refused to budge so much as a thousandth of a millimeter.

"We'll get my truck," Sam said grimly.

They backed Sam Adler's truck up to the block. They looped a steel cable around the stubborn obstacle—looped it in two directions so it couldn't slip off—then fastened the cable to the truck axle on both sides. Sam got behind the wheel and meshed the lowest gear.

The truck rumbled and groaned. The cables snapped taut. Sam drove down on the gas and the wheels of the truck threw up clouds of dust as they spun in futile effort. Then the truck lurched forward as the cable snapped.

"Yeah, we sure got something here," Nick Bleet repeated in an awed voice.

The grownups took time out for conference while the children of Hampton Corners grew bold, jumped on the block and off again, emitting little squeals of pleasure. Sam Adler's tot, after jumping on and off the block, turned to eye it in disdain.

"Bet the big shovel up to the gravel pit would lift that little old chunk of iron."

IT WAS an idea. They brought the great lumbering mechanical shovel from the gravel pit three miles away. This took a little time and, as it was now mid-day, most of the people scurried home for a quick lunch so they would be sure to be on hand

again when the shovel arrived.

Mack Lormer brought it into town. Once arrived, he got down from his seat and took careful survey of the situation.

"I'll have to bite a chunk out of the road in order to get under it," he said.

"Go ahead," Sam Adler told him. "We can fill in the road again. Go on. Lift that carnassian piece of iron."

Mack Lormer got down on his knees and examined the block closely. "You know—I don't think this stuff is iron or steel or anything else we ever seen before."

"Never mind about that. Lift it."

Mack got back into the seat behind his controls and all the children were shooed far back as he brought the crane around and jockeyed the great-toothed scoop into position.

The teeth bit into the dirt of the road like a scooping hand into a layer of warm butter. The earth chunked up and covered the block completely and there it was, nestled squarely in the center of the mechanical shovel.

All the power of the huge steel mechanism was brought to bear, but the crane began immediately to work in an adverse manner. The shovel stopped lifting before it had hardly started, and the rear end of the caterpillars began rising off the road. The tractor base of the crane went up to a forty-five-degree angle and Mack Lormer, white-faced, speedily reversed operations until the treads settled back to the ground.

"Well, I'll be damned," Sam Adler breathed.

"Count me in," Nick Bleet replied.

Mack Lormer came sheepishly down from his seat. "Guess something's wrong with the crane. I'll try again."

"Waste of time," Sam said. "Back her out and haul her away."

They uncovered the block and filled the hole in the road. The block re-

mained stolidly in its original position.

"Looks like maybe we better call somebody in," Nick Bleet said.

"Who?"

"Well, seems to me the government would be mighty interested in that little piece of iron—mighty interested."

"I got another idea—first, anyhow."

"What's that?"

"Looks like we should call a town meeting."

"What for?"

SAM ADLER was getting red in the face. "Why, man, there's money in that thing! Plenty of money! After all, it's ours. This is our town and we're entitled to the revenue. You recollect when they found oil in a churchyard down in Kentucky? Made the congregation rich."

"But this ain't oil. It's nothing but a damn stubborn chunk of iron."

Sam regarded his friend with pity. "Nick, did you ever see an anvil that wouldn't move? A block of metal that just sat in the air and broke cables on a ten-ton truck rather than budge a little?"

"Can't say I have."

"Well, neither has anybody else. It's bigger than the Dionne quintuplets. They'll come from all over the world! We'll board the thing up and charge a dime a head to look at it."

Nick Bleet got it. "Why sure! You're damn right. Bigger than the quints by a mile. A dime, hell! We'll charge a buck. And there'll be concessions. The crowds gotta eat. And souvenirs."

"That's right. But we got to work fast. The government'll want that little block—don't fool yourself."

"So what? The government can't take it away from us. It's ours. We found it. Ain't this a free country?"

"Then we got to watch out for sharpies—fast talking boys. They'll be

around to swipe it from us."

Nick grinned. "You figure they'll bring a bucket to carry it away in?"

Sam guffawed and slapped his friend on the back. "That's a good one. Let's call a meeting for tonight and talk it over with the town board. I tell you, we're going to be rich, Nick. Rich as Croesus."

No work had been done in Hampton Corners that day. The evening became a festive one with the spirit of holiday pervading the atmosphere: Word got about relative to the money-making possibilities of the metal block, and there was much laughter and happiness.

The children enjoyed it, too. They played around the strange immovable, horned thing—jumping on and off it—tugging at it with all their tiny powers

until they were finally called in to bed.

That night the town board met. It was the most exciting get-together they'd ever had. Plans were drawn up and Sam Adler was appointed Director of Publicity.

DEEP IN the night, while Hampton Corners slept, Lak-7 sent a crewman down to pick up the metal block. The crewman brought it back to the ship and tossed it into a tool box in the engine room. He reported back to the two leaders in their control chairs and then went back to work.

After he had left, Lak-7 indulged in a moment of smug triumph. "What did I tell you? Stupid. Just plain stupid."

"I'd never have believed it," Jan-4 said sadly.



NATURE KNOWS THE ANSWERS!

SCIENTISTS have gone back to nature to solve a tough problem—that's not an uncommon practice, but in this particular case it is truly ingenious. The problem is this: How can you cool a very hot jet or rocket engine and prevent it from melting itself by its own prodigious heat-output? You have to think of a cooling method because the most refractory metals known to man will simply fuse and run in their own heat.

Nature has encountered a similar problem and solved it very nicely. It so happens that a very large amount of heat is necessary to convert water into steam. We say that the latent heat of vaporization of water is higher than that of any other liquid. As a matter of fact, the evaporation of water at low temperatures absorbs a tremendous quantity of heat.

We can know this from a number of common observations. First, nature uses water to cool the human body! Water diffuses through the skin—we call it sweat—evaporates and in the process cools the body and takes away heat to do it. Early people observing this made their water and wine containers from goatskins through which small amounts of the liquids diffused, were evaporated and consequently cooled the interior. The army

uses porous canvas sacks today as water coolers.

So, reasoned the scientists, why not apply the same principles to cooling metals? And that is exactly what they are doing with experimental jet engines and rocket motors. Using either porous metal shells or a system of bored cooling ducts, they are feeding water to the shells of the engines and allowing it to evaporate or boil away. This absorbs enormous amounts of heat and the metal stays cool enough not to melt.

The regenerative rocket motor which originally surrounded the combustion chamber with the fuel ready to be fed to the chamber, worked very well and is the principle of many a rocket motor today. This idea somehow linked with evaporative cooling might eliminate any worries over refractory linings, which were at one time the limiting factor in rocket development.

It is fascinating to consider how often technicians turn to natural principles for the answers to their problems. It is really hard to find an idea which has not been anticipated by nature, from the simple idea of rotation to such a sophisticated idea as radar, which in modified form serves as the "eyesight" of bats and some varieties of insects.

Glenn Otis



The CLUB HOUSE

Where science fiction fan clubs get together.

THE UNIVERSE is a pretty complex thing. In the newspapers not long ago I read that the two hundred inch telescope at Palomar found that a nebula three hundred and sixty million light years away is retreating from us at a speed of thirty-eight thousand miles per second.

Maybe it is and maybe it isn't. A scientist named Dr. Hubble formulated what is known as Hubble's Law. According to this law, every million more light years a star is from the Earth, it appears to be traveling away from us an additional hundred miles per second. That is theory.

What is the fact? The fact can be stated this way: For every million light years farther away from the Earth a star is, its spectrum shifts into the red a certain amount. The amount of the shift agrees with the amount there would be if the star were retreating from us a hundred miles per second.

Is there any other interpretation of the facts? Any other theory? There is one and only one other. It violates Einstein's basic postulate that the velocity of light is a constant.

If the velocity of light increased a hundred miles per second every million light years when traveling in a vacuum without interruption there would be the same measured red shift.

If that is so, then Hubble's Law points to something more basic than Einstein, just as Einstein pointed to something more basic than Newton.

Newton postulated that mass is a constant. His law of gravitation was based on constant mass, and predicted the orbits of planets so accurately that for three centuries Newton's Law of Gravity was accepted as true. And in all that time only one thing seemed to violate that law. That was the precession of Mercury's orbit.

Einstein postulated that mass wasn't a constant, and his law of gravitation was even more accurate than Newton's. But Einstein postulated that the velocity of light was a constant. And on that assumption we now arrive at an interpretation of data that seems to indicate the farther we penetrate the vast distances of the universe the more it seems to be rushing away from us in all directions. Carrying

this interpretation of Hubble's Law to its logical conclusion, one billion eight hundred and sixty-two million light years from us in all directions any stars that might exist would be rushing away from us at the speed of light; and since another of Einstein's basic postulates is that nothing can go faster than light, there could be no matter at all beyond that distance.

Of course, to be consistent, matter traveling at the speed of light would cease to be matter, and would continue on at the speed of light forever unless it curved back and approached us again. But that gets confusing.

The point I wanted to bring out was simply that the statement in the newspapers was a statement of theory, not of fact. The fact the theory was based on was a red shift in the spectrum of the observed star. And that fact agrees with a postulate that light speed increases a hundred miles per second for every million years it travels without interruption.

THE UNIVERSE is a pretty complex thing, but the human body in many ways is just as complex. Just as subtle. The astronomer peers through his telescope and gathers data by means of camera and spectroscope. The theoretician takes the data and formulates theories about it. The diagnostician peers through his stroboscope or fluoroscope or studies the many phenomena, normal and abnormal, that go on in the human body, and formulates theories about the data he gathers.

New data lead to new theories, closer approximations to the truth, if there is a final truth. In highschool I contracted chronic sinusitis. I went to doctors. There was little that could be done to help it, and none of them held out hope for a cure. In college I stayed up many nights with unbearable pains behind my eyes. I paid out money I couldn't afford to try to get relief. Eye ear nose and throat specialists peered into my nostrils, poked swabs up my nose, used alternate pressure and suction equipment, etc., to no avail. In order to pay them their fees I had to skimp on food. There was a Safeway store in the neighborhood where I used to go on Saturdays at five minutes to six just as

they were closing, and get a large sack of fruits and vegetables that wouldn't keep until Monday. And there was a bakery where I could get day old pastries. In that way I managed to make both ends meet and pay the doctor bills.

Six or seven years ago I moved to Evanston Illinois, and before long I was hunting up another eye ear nose and throat specialist to treat me. He surprised me by refusing to treat me!

He said, "It appears to me that you might have allergies, and there's no use your paying out good money for treatments until you find out how much of your sinusitis is allergy and how much is infection."

He sent me to an allergy specialist who soon determined that I was sensitive to eleven different things. And of course you've guessed the punch line. I was allergic to the very things I had lived on in order to save enough on my living expenses to pay my doctor bills!

Theory had advanced a stage. By staying away from the substances my body was sensitive to my sinusitis vanished. Whenever it returned unexplainably I searched for the cause in things I had eaten, and generally found it.

Today theory is going a step farther. It is getting at the cause of allergy, and before many years it may be possible for me to take a shot or a pill that will eliminate the allergies.

And while biochemists and doctors and diagnosticians are using their instruments to get at the data necessary to understand what goes on in the human body, the astronomers and scientists are using their instruments to get the data necessary to understand what goes on in the Cosmic Body.

The pattern of research is the same in both cases, and in both fields theories that have given good results are slow to be abandoned. Only when the old theories are obviously violated by some fact that can't be explained away by some extraneous factor do the new theories take their place. When staying away from bananas and cinnamon buns gets rid of chronic sinusitis the diagnostician ceases to regard it as sinus infection. When data collected at Palomar says, "Either all matter in the universe was in one spot one billion eight hundred million years ago and exploded, or the velocity of light in vacuum is not a constant," perhaps it's time for the cosmic diagnosticians to reconsider.

You know, that's one nice thing about science-fiction. Imagine getting a reject from an editor on a story because, "The hypothesis used in this story is not in agreement with the 'facts' brought out in E. E. Smith's *Skylark* stories," or, "In Ray Bradbury's *Mars* stories no b.e.m. such as you describe in this story exists. Therefore we can't accept it."

THE STACK of fanzines has finally caught up with me on my journey out to the west coast. With them was a letter from Marion and Robert Bradley, Box 431, Tahoka, Texas. She says in part, "A copy of *MEZRAB* isn't accompanying this letter because the last two copies we sent you have been returned unclaimed from the post office. We'd appreciate it if you'd let us know your new address so we can send you the next issue for review." She doesn't say which address she sent them to, but it was probably an Evanston address. In the past year I have had four different addresses, and fanzines not sent first class generally won't reach me. At the time I am writing this my address is Box 272, Laguna Beach California, but by the time you read this it may be in Arizona or Nevada.

Every fanzine and letter to me should be sent to the CLUB HOUSE at Ziff-Davis in New York. Wherever I am they will forward it to me. Okay, Marion and Bob? For the benefit of you newcomers, Marion is the "Astra Zimmer" of poetic fame in fandom. Now a little about their fanzine.

MEZRAB: 20c; Box 431, Tahoka Texas. Marion says, "We use fiction, some poetry, but our main accent is on archaeology, cultural, legendary, literary and critical material, with a faint prejudice in favor of science, and the door open to such occult subjects as are scientifically tenable."

They are interested in getting such articles, and are definitely interested in getting subscribers interested in them. They are also badly in need of art work.

Not having a copy of the fanzine I can't tell you any more about it; but judging from past performance I'm sure Marion and Bob are turning out a product worth sending for. And one you'd be happy to have your literary effort appear in.

Next on the list is a letter from Edward Wood of 31 N. Aberdeen St., Chicago 7, Illinois, who says, "Your discussion in the July *Amazing Stories* deals with a topic very dear to me. The fan magazine situation...I agree it is better to praise than to pan. But surely you realize that readers have limited funds and time to indulge their hobby. Why should these be squandered among the trivial, unimportant, stupid fan magazines? Among all the fan magazines of the last two decades how many were of value?... One shudders to see such worthwhile productions like *Fanscient*, *Science-Fantasy Review*, etc., give up the ghost while hordes of one-shots, humor oddities, etc., come up and are just as quickly forgotten. Most aren't worth the price of the postage...Even when given away they do not justify the time spent in looking at

them. I think it is unfair to the rather few excellent publications in the fan field to equate them with the magazine which has only the enthusiasm of the editor and little else to recommend. Why let the weeds kill off the food plants?"

You have a very good and valid argument there, Edward. The main thing wrong with it is, who is to decide which are the weeds? Me? In looking back over the two or three years I've been reviewing fanzines in this column there are definite patterns to the history of a fanzine. Type one begins as a mediocre effort by someone who never ran a mimeograph before and is clumsy at it. In a few issues it picks up subscribers and contributors, and the editor gains in skill and puts a little money into it. It becomes a topnotch fanzine. Then, somehow, the editor loses interest. He stops spending all his spare time on it and suspends publication. Type two begins as a mediocre effort by someone who never ran a mimeograph before and is clumsy at it. He doesn't improve. He gets tired of publishing the dang thing and quits. Type three is a one-shot and says so, and either doesn't reappear, or becomes a regular fanzine through popular demand. Type four has been appearing for ages and will continue to appear until suddenly without warning the editor stops for some one of a million reasons.

Now then, Edward, what is the object of reviewing any fanzine in *Amazing Stories*? In sports, in professional baseball for example, only the topnotchers get to play. Once they slip they are booted out to the sticks. But at a picnic you and you and your neighbor choose up sides and wham away at the ball, and crack your knuckles trying to catch flies, having a good time. If you knock a home run or two you feel good. If you fan out every time you're up to bat your neighbor doesn't stop speaking to you. Neither does he go around telling everyone what a rotten ballplayer you are. He says, "Atsa ol boy, Eddy. Get in there and wham the daylights out of it next time." Even if you aren't in the game but just watching, you have fun encouraging the players, groaning and cheering along with the women folks.

Amazing Stories is professional. The circulations figures tell the story, just as the gate receipts tell the story in pro baseball. It isn't Howard Browne who shells out the money each month to bring it to you; it's you readers who shell it out. And in round numbers a thousandth of a cent out of every quarter you spend for this magazine goes into my own pocket. When I slip there will be others to step into my shoes, leaving me on the sidelines.

No one claims that any fanzine is professional. Some are almost pro in quality, but most are published in the same way you play ball at a picnic. The way I look at it your dime or twenty cents is not

buying something, but merely acting as a donation to the fan editor to help him pay expenses.

Bob Tucker, editor of *SCIENCE FICTION NEWS LETTER*, P.O. Box 260, Bloomington Illinois, says this about the *CLUB HOUSE* in his fanzine: Rog Phillips' long and gossip-laden column seems to be the best single source for promoting sample copy requests, and subscriptions. He has plenty of space to spare, is informative and opinionated, and reveals a genuine interest in the fan magazines that is communicated to the new reader. *NEWS LETTER* gets more requests for samples from his column than any other single source, with fully half of the samplers taking subscriptions later.

Fun is the key to fandom. When you stop having fun in it you drop out. An example of what I mean is the following fanzine:

* * * *

ALARMING STORIES: trade for another fanzine or an old copy of *Science Fiction promags*; Noah and Anna Lee McLeod, Apt. 5 - 571 Otsego St., Havre-de-Grace, Maryland. A letter accompanies the fanzine. It says, "Included in this envelope you will find the first attempt of us McLeods at editor-publishing of a slanzine. We are a trifle late at getting our mag into the mail, and our typer is now broken down so that you are getting this letter in pen-and-ink instead of more legible style. Having made our apologies, we will go on to say that we have had great fun in bringing forth this contribution to slandom. Even though *ALARMING STORIES* may arouse no comments, we did have a good time. 'Nough said for now. Sincerely,..."

The McLeods had "help" in getting out their fanzine. A printer's devil named Ardis Claire, age nineteen months, Noah and Anna Lee and their daughter live in one room 14 x 18 feet (as do a lot of people today) where they eat, sleep, and do what they want, including putting out the first issue of their fanzine. Fun? Of course they had fun! And as I read their fanzine I had fun sharing their pleasure.

They're adults, and their fanzine has very well written stuff in it that even Edward Wood would enjoy reading. Should I wait until their second year of publication to boost them? Or should I wait until the twelve year old fan editor having fun being his own boss in the publishing game reaches a ripe twenty-one years of experience before giving him a boost? Hah! By that time he will have too much sense to devote his time to a fanzine!

* * * *

EUSIFANO: 10c; Eugene Science Fantasy Artisans, 146 E. 12th Ave., Eugene Oregon. "Published at intervals right on

the interval." Editor Rosco Wright, with the whole Eugene fan club participating. In the July issue is a highly competent analysis of the pro stf editors. All of them. Norman Hartman authors an intriguing article on "Monsters of the Future." It's an interesting subject. Imagine an intelligent race of non-humans, evolved in another couple of million years and perhaps an inch or two tall, or long, as the case may be, digging up the thigh bone of a human. Eventually they get the whole skeleton of a human and build a giant building to house it...

Three short fantasies and sundry short fillers complete the issue, making this the best current clubzine project. Its main fault from my viewpoint is that it doesn't have enough news about the doings of the club, but from the viewpoint of the general reader this is an asset, because few people want a clubzine that is filled with the minutes of the last meeting.

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; James V. Taurasi, 137-03 32nd Ave., Flushing 54, N.Y. A fan newszine which appears regularly every two weeks, and brings the latest happenings faster than any other zine because Taurasi keeps in regular contact with all the stf publishers and most of the major fan groups. In this zine you can also find out what stf movies are appearing and where, and what stf movies are being produced. Running currently is an account of Ackerman's trip to England and Europe, and the big fan convention over there.

* * *

CHIMERICAL REVIEW: 15c; 2/25c; John Kalas and Dennis Strong, 942 Scribner Ave., N.W., Grand Rapids, Mich.. A good general fanzine with stories, articles, and a letter department. Banyan Griaire is author of an article discussing the "Fantasy Writer's Union". He means the FWA which was started at Portland last September, and which I suggested be called the Prophetic Writers of America so its letters could be PWA. If the FWA ever gets going it should be a good thing. However, a year has passed and all I've heard about it is that it hasn't got rolling yet.

C-R accents amateur fantasy fiction and is always anxious to meet new fan authors who are seriously trying to develop their writing talents. There are a couple of nice short stories in this current issue for review. And its editors are working toward making their zine an outstanding medium for talented writers.

* * *

SPACESHIP: 10c; Bob Silverburg and Saul Diskin, 760 Montgomery St., Brooklyn 12, N.Y.. These two Brooklyn fans are prolific mimeographers and quite adept at the writing game. They always put out plenty of pages filled with interesting and often controversial subjects. Take the titles of articles in this current issue: "Are Fans Skeptics?" "How not to Swallow Diabetics."

On the back page Bob announces that Saul takes his leave with the current issue, and goes away to college. But Bob is going to continue publishing, and make his zine 24 pages each issue. He'll need plenty of subscribers to make a go of it, and you can't find a more entertaining ten cents worth.

* * *

PORTLAND STF NEWSLETTER: Box 3555, Portland 8, Ore.. No price listed. Ron Allaway, editor. If you live in or are interested in the northwest you should get this zine. It is devoted to fan doings in Oregon and Washington, including announcements of meeting of the many fan clubs in that area. In addition it carries fiction and occasional articles, and announcements of the appearance of new fanzines in that area.

* * *

COSMAG: bi-monthly, Ian Macauley, 57 East Park Lane, Atlanta, GA.. Ten cents per copy. Plenty of good fan art in this zine, and good fan fiction to go with it. "Disbelief" by Deaver Thomas is the best story in the issue from every standpoint. And Ian Macauley must think so too since it's featured on the cover and has a cover illo of a scene from it.

"Out of the Void," the editorial in the zine, has this quote: "Constantly the question is asked us, why do you bother to publish that thing? The answer is quite simple. We believe that a fanzine, as well as being a lot of fun to publish, will help further the cause of stf and fantasy along. That is our purpose, to bring to the minds of the ordinary readers the true definition of stf. To convince them that a lot of fun can be gathered by fan activities."

The theme of a lot of fan editors is that it's fun to be a fan. And that's what I have been saying.

* * *

ADOZINE: 5c; W. C. Butts, 2058 E. Atlantic St., Philadelphia 34, Pa.. A pocket size zine devoted mainly to ads. Would you like to get copies of certain back issues of prozines such as *Amazing!* Or sell them? Then this is your medium. Adzines all have a big circulation, and their ads are very

reasonable. In this one you can get a full page ad for fifty cents. The subscription price is negligible. For five cents you can find out where to get that particular book or prewar magazine you've been wanting.

* * *

WASTEBASKET: free upon request. Vernon L. McCain, 146 E. 12th Ave., Eugene Oregon. Its editor classes it as a generalzine. It's printed and has a slick cardboard front and back with two color illos on them.

Would you like to build your own spaceship? Norman E. Hartman tells you how in this issue. Let's see what he says... Oh-oh. He says... Well anyway, according to him you can build it out of stuff you can pick up anywhere. You'd have to read it to appreciate it and I won't spoil it by lifting quotes from it.

Almost as good as Lee Hoffman's "The Planaria." He just touches on the most interesting aspect of the planaria though, when he says, "It is very difficult to clear a Planaria." From the accompanying drawing of one it seems they are victims of congenital cockeyedosis (a disease caused by engrams).

But those two articles are on the lighter side. There's more, and all very well written. I'd say this fanzine is worth a quarter of anyone's money to read, and it costs nothing. But in my own opinion that's hardly fair to Vernon McCain, so why don't you enclose a couple of three cent stamps when you write him asking for a copy?

* * *

THE JOURNAL OF SPACE FLIGHT: no price listed. Official organ of the Chicago Rocket Society which holds meetings once a month. If you're interested write to Michael Conley, Secretary, 207 S. Addison St., Bensenville Illinois. The current issue features an analysis of the problem of evading hazardous objects in space, by Wayne Proell. Also, as a regular department of the journal, is the Rocket Abstracts, a collection of excerpts from dozens of current magazines that are of interest to rocket enthusiasts.

* * *

TITANIA: 25c; quarterly official organ of the Queens Sif Society, Will Sykora, Director; mimeo'd by Stan Sexner, 1308 Hoe Ave., Bronx, N.Y.. The issue received for review -consists of stories and articles written by the members of the QSFS, some of them very well done. Especially "The Faraway Swamp," by Raymond L. Clancy.

While living on Long Island last winter I was invited to speak before the QSFS. A week before the scheduled date I re-

ceived a handsomely printed card notice that I was going to speak, which was a pleasant surprise. The meeting was at the home of the Sykoras in a large room reserved for sif doings. The audience was quite large and I had an enjoyable time answering their questions. Afterward Mrs. Sykora served an enjoyable dinner, and Will showed Mari and me the stacks of pictures he has collected.

* * *

ODD: 15c; 2/25c; Duggie Fisher, 1302 Lester St., Poplar Bluff, Mo.. Forty pages of mimeography makes this a monumental job for the editor, so he must enjoy doing it. Published bi-monthly.

"Death Preferred" by Jerome Bartlett really holds the interest up to the very end, but left me a little confused. "Doubt", by J.T. Oliver is soundly motivated and professionally done.

The many departments and articles make this a well rounded couple of hours of entertainment.

* * *

THE LITTLE CORPUSCLE: 10c; free to members of The Little Monsters of America. Address, TLMA, 408 W. Bell St., Statesville North Carolina.

Big news in this issue is that The Napoleon Fantasy Club, Box 184, Napoleon Ohio, is now an affiliate of the Little Monsters of America. Maybe the Little Monsters will swallow all of fandom and make it a big Monster. It's useless to resist. Send 'em a dime and be swallowed.

* * *

THE CENTAURIAN: 15c; 2/25c; Bob Farnham, 104 Mountain View Drive, Dalton, Georgia. The Centaurians is also a fan club. Another well rounded fanzine, too, with fan drawings and even a crossword puzzle.

Eva Firestone authors an interesting discussion of Gegenschein, and other mysteries in connection with the space around the Earth. Noah McLeod has a short story, "Tuffy Travels in Time."

* * *

ORB: quarterly, 20c; Bob Johnson, Box 941, Greeley Colorado. A rough green front and back with a Ralph Rayburn Phillips cover illo, with an interior illustration in gold ink on slick black that is really a beauty. The whole zine is fan publishing carried to a fine art. The subject matter is top rate too. "First Generation" by Betsy Curtis is the kind of story that I like to write myself at times, presenting the viewpoint of something alien, only in this case it isn't alien, but an unborn baby.

There is a biography of the author of "The Wizard of Oz" Sandy Charnoff reviews Velikovsky's "Worlds in Collision" and dubs it a masterpiece of Hobson-Jobson thinking. Do you know what the Law of Hobson-Jobson is? One way of putting it, it is to logic and language translation what puns are to humor.

Several excellent poems appear in ORB also.

* * *

RHODOMAGNETIC DIGEST: 25c; bimonthly, published now on an offset press which its editor describes as "an ungainly monster with more rollers, gadgets, thingamabobs,..., and whatsits on it than a man can master in a lifetime." Editor, Don Fabun, 2524 Telegraph Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

Vaughn Greene Rivers has an article on the Flying Saucers that contains some original material. Leland Sapiro is author of something referred to as Mr. Sapiro's second lecture, which discusses the second formulation of the "Irrelevant" paradox.

Don Fabun authors a very long discussion, "Science Fiction and the New Cosmology", something that has been going on in England. It's a theory on the origin of matter from cosmic clouds of hydrogen. It introduces something new in the way of origins of the universe by postulating continuous creation rather than a primordial cosmic explosion. Altogether there are

forty pages of interesting reading, and plenty of material for thought in this zine.

* * *

BEWARE: 10c; Ken Beale, 115 East Moshulu Parkway, Bronx 67, New York. Published quarterly. Contents fan fiction, articles, and poetry. "Gold Lensman" by E. E. Grimm, Ph. D. (an obvious pseudonym), is a takeoff on E. E. Smith's Lensman stories. A pretty good one, too. The contents of *Beware* are all in a humorous vein. You'd enjoy it. Cover drawing is by Rotsler, which is enough of a recommendation.

* * *

IMAGINATIVE COLLECTOR: combined with DAWN: 15c, 2/25c; Russell K. Watkins, 203 E. Wampum Ave., Louisville 9, Ky.. A fanzine devoted to articles of interest to the sf collector, and a letter department of interest to general fandom, where great issues are argued *ad infinitum* to everyone's satisfaction, including those who just read them. There is also a department, "Imaginative Reporter," where Ken Beale gives brief reports on what to expect in the publishing field in the near future.

* * *

Guess that's all this time.

—ROG PHILLIPS



Trade In Your Old Liver!

by Salem Lane

PUMPING mechanism (if the word can be used) undamaged.

The experimental work on animals has resulted in the literal manufacture of an artificial rubber-plastic heart valve which can be sewed in as a substitute and replacement for the regular damaged heart valve! Untried on humans, this substitute valve has worked perfectly on dogs who have carried it for more than a year. The promise is great; whether or not it will be fulfilled in the case of humans is still unknown, but the chances certainly are good!

This is typical of a trend throughout general surgery. It has been discovered after long search that science is uncovering more and more materials which may be used in body repair, which will adhere to and become part of, the structure they are designed to repair or assist. Metals, plastics, rubberoids and similar substances are proving their worth. We may expect to see the day eventually when almost any major organ may be capable of having certain repairs made upon it, using man-made substances as the replacement element.

REPLACING human organs and portions of the body with mechanical artifacts is becoming more and more common in modern surgery. The wide dissemination of information on prosthetic techniques whereby unfortunate victims of war and accident are equipped with mechanical devices to aid them, shows this new trend clearly. But what is even more important, scientists are going inside the body to do their work!

This doesn't refer to conventional bone operations or tissue grafts which are now routine procedure. Rather, the new technique is about to deal with organs like the heart and liver. For example, the latest experiments in this field, while so far restricted to experimental animals, show such promise that it is only a matter of time before human beings undergo the treatment.

Rheumatic fever is a particularly cruel killer, striking as it does in the early years. Children, victims of this crippling damager of the heart, suffer the rest of their comparatively short lives. Very often the damage done is primarily to the valves of the heart, leaving the actual

The Reader's FORUM



LETTER OF THE MONTH

Dear Editor:

There has to be a first time for everything, and this is the first letter I have ever written to a magazine. I feel it is time to let you know how I feel about science fiction in general, and about your amazing covers in particular.

It is only five years since my boys became interested in this form of fiction, and through them, I also found it enthralling. Not because it is a form of escape from the humdrum of daily living so much as because, of all forms of fiction, it is the only one that induces deep thinking. Indeed, it *forces* the mind of the reader to exercise itself, therefore become more acute, either in agreeing with whatever bit of scientific fact the author expounds, or else in cogitating carefully over just why one cannot agree....

There is no other form of fiction which can truthfully pretend to do that. Therefore, hurrah for science-fiction, bad or good, let's have more of it.

Personally, I do not agree with many readers who want old authors repeatedly in your pages. I say, give us new authors, whether or not their work comes up to the masters, just so they propound new ideas, new theories. Anything that will agitate the brain-matter. I am sure many many readers will agree with me in this, as the old writers seem to work into a formula, and then their stories follow a pattern, whereas new authors must try different lines before they attain success. By this I do not mean to set aside the old writers, by no means, but I do think that AMAZING should stress ideas, not authors.

The shorts that you are printing are also just what many of us need; new scientific facts or old, every one is extremely interesting. Keep them up.

Since everyone has something to say about covers, I must add my two cents. One thing I must admit, according to many cover pictures, women, far from being the weaker sex we have long been accustomed to taking for granted, are hereby proven to be far hardier, stronger, more adaptable than the male. Almost every cover shows a beauteous female, *attired in almost the minimum of space suits*, in open space, without helmet over her adorable face, and

her curly (always) locks streaming into the vacuum, while her male companion must be well-clad in a very substantial-looking space suit, bulky and clumsy, helmet sealed, oxygen tank attached, etc., etc.

Poor, poor men. What weak, puerile creatures you seem to be, even though every one of you is the pick of the nation's physical specimens, or you would not be in the Space Rogers!

Poor, poor weaklings, indeed! You must carry blasters, disintegrating guns, stuff yourselves with sustaining tablets of concentrated foods, yet you cannot conquer space as these so lovely women seemed to have done....

Pray tell me, gentle reader, of what marvelous composition are these Fems made, that they are so much more durable than their men?

One thing I wish to say, with which I am sure very few readers will concur: I do not care a whit about the author's biography, his likes and dislikes leave me cold, and his home life is or should be his own. I do not care how many wives and ex-wives he has, nor whether he is left-handed or ambidextrous, or even if he has a temper! Not I! All I want to know about any author is that he can write, and has ideas I can study. If this rouses a storm of criticism among your fandom, let it. I also am one person who feels that in a play or movie, it is the story that is the thing and that the actors should not be judged because they have a big name and notoriety, but rather whether he or she fits the part and acts it well. I do think actors and actresses are people, not exhibits, and should be allowed to live their own lives, even as you and I, without the prying eyes of everyone who purchases a ticket and so thinks he has the right to every intimate little secret concerned with said actor. All who are in favor, say AYE!

For a first, and probably last, fan letter, this has assumed the size of a congressman's speech, so now!

Thank you for listening in.

Anna Gross
R. F. D. No. 2
Somerville, New Jersey

Your editor will, with your permission, Anna, pass over your remarks on the male section of our readership. Other masculine

voices will do the job for us.... Too, our guess is that, as you say, few readers will agree with your lack of interest in the backgrounds and personalities of our authors. Anyone who creates, be it fiction, art, music, or any other form of entertainment, can't help but be interesting as a person to those who form his audience. This is such a basic truth that entire magazines are devoted to just such material—such as the motion picture magazines, etc. Possibly the most universal urge of mankind is the desire to write, to express its thoughts and beliefs. That is why nearly everyone feels a kinship with published writers: given the opportunity, he says, and it could be my name on that story—only I would have written it better! —Ed.

NO WAY TO TREAT A LADY!

Dear Editor:

Several months ago in one of the sf magazines (I don't remember whether it was AS or FA) the story "Star Kings" came out. I think it was written by a Mr. Hamilton. Anyway it was a very good story and I was wondering if the author was writing a sequel. It seems he left his readers up in the air wondering if Zarth Arn was going to bring John Gordon through time bodily to his Lianna.

Now, since you asked for fan's opinion on "We, the Machine" here's mine: It was a very good story, but personally I like the Buck Rogers type better—you know space ships, ray guns, etc. in spite of what Robert Jones of Hollywood says.

In this month's issue, here's how the stories rated for my estimation:

1. Good Luck, Columbus!
2. We, the Machine
3. When Vengeance Rules
4. The Sky was Filled with Light
5. What Price Gloria
6. You'll Die on Ganymede.

As for the covers, I've never paid too much close attention to them. I'm more interested in what's inside. Still I can't see what all the hubbub over the sex angle is about and I should think that after all these centuries people would get used to the idea. Really, after all, it's nothing new. It's a good thing Eve didn't feel the same way some of the readers do about sex.

In your Reader's Forum I came across a letter I really got a bang out of. It's written by one Basil Burdell, D.D., of Los Angeles and he spoke of women really enjoying wolf-whistles, yet are apt as not to appear annoyed. Ha! That guy's on to the ways of us gals. I for one like to be whistled at, even if I pretend not to have heard the would-be wolf. My hubby says it's one way for some fellows to say, "Not bad." So if a lot of gals would take a whistle as a compliment instead of always an insult they wouldn't have to get their dander up even if they choose to ignore them. While maybe a whistle isn't the best etiquette in the world, it can bolster the ego of the married woman & mother-of-

two.

Two fans wrote to me some time back wanting to correspond, but it seems that they've both disappeared. When I wrote back, one letter was returned marked "No Such Address" and the other as yet I haven't heard from. What happened to those guys who said they wanted to correspond and then don't answer?

Mrs. C. M. Cooper
Cle Elum, Washington
Route 2

To our knowledge Hamilton has not yet written a sequel to "Star Kings"—although we'd sure admire to see one!... Since Reader Cooper likes "space ships, ray guns, etc., we especially call her attention to this month's cover yarn.... No matter how you tune it, a wolf whistle still turns a lotta heads.

—Ed.

TEXAS GOLD MINE!

Dear Editors:

From time to time I have noticed letters concerning back issues, so I believe the following will be of interest to your readers.

I have an almost complete file of AMAZING STORIES magazines. The missing numbers are 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 12, of Vol. 16; Vol. 18; 5, 8, 9, of Vol. 24; and 4, 5, 6 of Vol. 25.

The edges of some of the early volumes are yellowed with age and the backs are reinforced with transparent tape. The back covers of several issues of Vol. 19 are missing, otherwise the condition of the magazines is excellent.

This collection includes the Shaver mystery together with the old classics such as "Skylark," "Triplanetary," "Spacehounds of I.P.C." etc.

As I am now very crowded for space, I will sell these magazines to the person making the best offer. Requests for individual copies cannot be considered as I will not destroy the sequence of the collection.

L. W. Bonnell
7412 Willis Avenue
Fort Worth, Texas

HIS COMPLAINT IS WITH THE READERS

Dear Ed,

I have several complaints to make, mostly pertaining to your READER'S FORUM! Upon opening my August issue of AS I immediately read FOUR letters containing reference to a statement made by Mr. Clinton J. Reed. This I liked, but in one of those letters Mr. Warren Brands stated that he didn't like the illustrations. Well I DO!

Still on the subject of illos, many people have informed me that they didn't care for the scantily clad girls which appear on the covers and/or inside your mag.

Well, I think they add a touch of beauty which is absolutely necessary to ANY magazine.

I don't think you will print this letter, but here's hoping you will.

Jack Finley
Box 21
Drayton, South Carolina

It's a novel experience for us to learn that a reader's complaint is aimed at other readers rather than at the editors! This time, let Reader Brands rise to his own defense; we'll sit back and enjoy a "let's him and you fight!"

—Ed.

WHAT'S STOPPING US?

Dear H. B.,

The new format is fine, as far as it goes. It doesn't go very far, you know. Changed printing on the spine and better grade of paper is all. All you have to do now is go slick. Speaking of going slick, what in the hell is stopping you?

"We the Machine" is all you said it would be. This is straight science fiction. Unusual, isn't it? Vance is getting better with every story he writes. Of course if Vance is a pseudonym for some "name" author. I've just put my foot in it. Anyhow—it was good.

Robinson's short was good. Almost as good as the lead novel. There seems to be an upsurge of new authors. Either that or nobody uses his own name any more.

So Chet Geir is Guy Archette. Why didn't you just give him his own name for the by-line? On second thought, now I know why he used a pen name for "You'll Die on Ganymede." I wouldn't claim it either.

See you have a new cover artist. Comment? Bring back Jones! Interior illos much improved. They're clearer. Particularly liked Gerald Hohns' illo for Robinson's yarn.

The readers' section is its usual lively self. The exception being Robert Jones. You should have done the guy a favor by not printing his letter! Oh well, there's one in every crowd.

Jan Romanoff
26601 South Western
Lomita, California

Reader Romanoff is urged to take it easy. Better paper is a big step in the right direction; there'll be others when and if conditions permit them.... Vance is Vance—just as Robinson is Robinson and not a pseudonym. Okay?

—Ed.

HARPING "BIZARRE"!

Dear Mr. Browne,

Recently I renewed my acquaintance with an old friend, AMAZING STORIES. I feel that the stories are not of such a high standard as were those of '47 and '48, but

very entertaining nonetheless.

I've just finished your August edition, and having nothing either very good or very bad to say about the stories. Average, or slightly below, I would say.

However, one comment about Raymond Jones' "Wrong Side of Paradise." I notice that in his little biographic sketch (which item, incidentally, is a fine idea) Mr. Jones states that he looks with disfavor on "bizarre" stories "distilled out of Poe."

I read this declaration with loud mental hand-clapping, nodding my head vigorously, and exclaiming "Quite right! Quite right!"

Then imagine my surprise when on reading Jones' effort to find it was one of the most "bizarre" creations I have ever come across. I am not objecting to this type of story, although I don't personally care too much for this type of bleeding and fantasy with science fiction.

Nevertheless there seems to be some discrepancy in what Mr. Jones thinks about s-f and the way he writes it. He's a darned good writer, so why doesn't he forget parades made out of nothing by parasitic baseballs, and write some science fiction?

Well, just in case you're still reading this unsparkling letter, let me add a couple more lines.

First I want to add my voice to those clamoring for another "Tharn" story.

I noticed that Mr. Shaver has vanished from your pages. Did the "Medieval Illcit" finally put the whammy on him, or has he been dero'd into the realm of pure imaginaries?

A sad loss, in any case, because whether one agreed or disagreed with Mr. S. he was always interesting.

Well, keep up the good work.

Michael Bishop
12 Avoca Avenue
Toronto, Ont., Canada

We can only assume that Ray Jones changed his viewpoint somewhere between his writing "The Wrong Side of Paradise" and his autobiography, which would account for the difference between what he practices and what he preaches. We do know, however, that his "Paradise" novel was one of the more popular of the long lengths we've presented recently.... Neither whammy nor dero explains why the Shaver stories no longer appear in our magazines.... Your vote for another "Tharn" story has been tallied....

—Ed.

SHAYER CAN BE REASONABLE!

Dear Ed:

This is my first venture into the field of commercial literature, even if it is not on a money basis. It just so happens that I have written a few hundred stories, which I now keep hidden away in my darkest corner for reasons of my own. Every time I proof-read one of my creations, I get that low low feeling. But somehow

I had to satisfy my immense ego, so I decided to feed it by seeing this in print.

I have not read AMAZING STORIES for years and years, as some of your fans put it, but I have spent a good portion of my allowance buying the mag for the past twenty-five months. And I will not say that AS is the best of its type in the field, and that it is my dearest possession, but for some reason I hound the stands from the morning on, the day a new issue comes out. In general it is a good, interesting, wonderful, amazing mag, which I enjoy reading till dawn lights the night skies.

I have just finished reading "We, the Machine" in one of your recent issues, and all I can say is, it is great!!!!!!

I may be a bit radical saying this, but I thought the Shaver mysteries were outstanding, but I can't seem to get any of those particular copies. I suppose the fans have bought up every available copy and hidden them away in a dark room. If any of you nice people happen to have a few around that you do not want, I would be intrigued to receive them. I have only read the all Shaver issue, but, brother, I was really living. Of course I will be glad to pay a reasonable price (I said reasonable), but I would appreciate it if some were sent. Thanks a million.

Gabriel Hornstein
246 Peshine Avenue
Newark 8, New Jersey

YES OR NO?

Dear Ed,

Not having written you for about five years, I have got a few things on my mind I would like to put on paper. First: the Reader's Forum in the August issue was, I believe, the best I have seen in a long time. I think this is the best part of your mag. as it not only enables you to know what your readers want, but gives the readers a chance to meet other people interested in s-f. More power to you on that.

"Martian Through Georgia" was one of the best yarns I have read in a long time. It was funny at first, but not so funny at second thought if you have ever run into government red tape. It is amazing what people will let go on under their noses when they can't see the forest for the trees.

I have nothing to say about the covers except that it is stupid to see the hero wearing a space suit and the girl a bathing suit.

While everybody else is having his say about Shaver, I would like to put in my two-cents' worth:

The Shaver stories may be no longer popular—I guess you know that better than anyone else—however, I believe you owe your readers an answer to this question:

WAS THE SHAVER MYSTERY A
HOAX?

A YES or NO answer will put a lot of

people's minds at rest. If the answer is YES, then well and good, it was a good bit of writing. If the answer is NO, then that brings up a lot more questions that I won't go into here. After all the publicity you gave the stories, you owe your readers a YES or NO answer to this question. Right?

You have a good well-rounded mag. Keep it that way!

I also have some s-f mags. (all kinds) I would sell. Not too good, but all the pages are there (cost over \$40 new.)

I wonder if there are any s-f bugs in Nashville who would like to meet another s-f bug? My hobbies are radio and photography.

Keep up the good work!

James C. Shelton
604 Boscobel Street
Nashville, Tennessee

Only Richard Shaver can answer your question, Jim. Your present editor's personal opinion is that the Shaver "Mystery" was pure fiction—and badly written fiction at that. But we repeat: that is a personal opinion—and very few readers may agree. We defend their right to disagree!

—Ed.

LOST: FIVE MEN AND ONE HOPE!

Dear Ed,

I just bought the August issue of your mag. I haven't read any of the stories yet, but I have read the Reader's Forum. If you cut down the size and number of letters printed, and put even a short short in, I would be much happier.

On the cover controversy, there has been only one thinly clad girl on your covers in the last nine issues. I think you should at least go 50-50.

The July issue was good, especially "We, the Machine" and "What Price Gloria?" "When Vengeance Rules" was good too. By the way, I couldn't find any place where "Five Men and a Machine Held Earth's Only Hope for Survival!"

Richard Brown
6910 Indiana Avenue
Kansas City 5, Missouri

The cover caption you quote in your last sentence did not fit the story, as you observed. To learn the reason, you'll need to know the procedure followed in writing "We, the Machine." First, the subject matter for the cover was dreamed up during a conference between your editors and our Art Department. Second, upon receipt of the finished cover painting, we called in Gerald Vance and spent the better part of an afternoon, plotting a yarn to fit that cover. As originally worked out, the plot and the "Five Men and a Machine" went together like ham and eggs, so that we included it in the wording that each month goes on the cover of AMAZING STORIES. Then, with the cover plates made and the

covers themselves printed up, Vance turned in his story—and calmly announced he'd changed the plot to "include out" the five men! The only reason we didn't use a raygun on him then and there was that the story was even better his way than as we'd originally conceived it!

—Ed.

INSIDE IS WHAT COUNTS!

Dear Editor,

I've been reading your mag for almost ten years and have enjoyed it along with other S-F magazines.

Like several other readers I've never written letters to the editors before but I decided I would add my voice to those wanting another Shaver story. They are very interesting, to say the least.

There seems to be quite a controversy about your covers. I never pay attention to them as I'm buying AMAZING for the stories, not the cover. Just keep the stories as good as you have been doing and you'll have me buying AMAZING for the next twenty years.

D. S. Young
2106 West Magnolia Street
Pensacola, Florida

After twenty years—what? —Ed.

WHAT IS PAR?

Dear Sir,

1951 is the first year since 1939 that the hard currency barrier has softened sufficiently to allow a continuous supply of sf. Even now subscriptions must be lodged by a rather devious route since dollars are mighty hard to come by.

Between 1939 and 1950 magazines have filtered into this country only at rates slightly in advance of zero. This means that "down under" fans have been existing on a literary diet deficient in all the major vitamins. I was wondering if you would publish this letter of appeal to U. S. fans asking them if they would help me out in making up that lost reading. If any fans have back numbers of magazines that they can part with I would be glad to make any arrangements for exchange or purchase which do not involve actual dollar transport. Perhaps some fans may be interested in receiving sterling area publications as an exchange medium?

Have been most interested in comparing the general standard of 1951 magazines with that of '39. "Amazing" has made tremendous contributions to fandom with Rog Phillips' "Club House" and with the liberal editorial policy in organizing the "Reader's Forum." These sections alone make continued subscription worth while.

I can't, however, be enthusiastic about the standard of the stories—definitely well below par. In this regard your mag. must be rated well down on the list of contemporary zines. "Amazing" seems to have the policy "quantity rather than quality." How

about a policy of buying fewer stories at higher rates and producing a smaller but better collection of fiction.

Inside art work is only average pulp standard but an occasional cover is slightly better than those of several of your competitors.

It is distressing to see a fine old pioneer fall by the wayside. How about a shot of rejuvenator?

Rex Meyer
91 Bowdon Street
Ryde, N. S. W., Australia

To determine whether stories are above or below par, we must first find out what is par. Is par your taste in stories or is it Reader Young's, whose letter immediately precedes the above? Is par the editor's choice or is the taste of the "geewhizboy-booy" reader the standard by which science fiction is to be judged? Frankly, we think all of this, and more, put together form par—which is why Amazing Stories and Fantastic Adventures are as varied in their contents as it's possible to be.... Your point of our buying fewer stories at higher rates to produce "a smaller but better" selection of fiction is no point at all. Why? Because higher rates do not automatically produce "better" stories. The stories we use are the best, from the viewpoint of the majority of our readers, that we can get at any price. We know this because our circulation leads the field—and is constantly growing. What more can we say?

—Ed.

OH, MR. G—...!

Dear H. B.:

Trying to write a letter while listening to the radio is probably not the best environment to express one's thoughts in. However, if you will bear with me through the rather disjointed sections of this letter, I'll appreciate it.

The cover for the August issue was fair, no better. Jones needs some new themes. While on the subject of cover artists—how is it, month in and month out, we get nothing except Jones' covers? The art department surely must be aware that there are other equally talented artists. How about a Lawrence, or a Bok (on F.A.)

The stories were exceptionally good this time. Top three, in order, were: "The Wrong Side of Paradise"—Jones, "From Hidden Worlds"—Lesser, and "The Feathered Weapon"—Geier. Not bad, three out of six.

Your editorial should provoke quite a few comments. For the record, I completely agree with you. There has been a rather "unhealthy" emphasis put on "adult" science fiction. Oh, they all spout and yammer about "mature" s.f., but can any of them really define it. A good example of this would be "Galaxy." Supposedly they are the "only" mag which offers "adult" science fiction. They constantly tell their readers "We are an adult magazine, we are

the *only* adult magazine." In other words, if you read any other magazine you are childish. But when I overlook all the rave notices what do I find. This: nothing that s.f. hasn't done better, a bragging editor, and a generally snobbish attitude. Don't get me wrong, *Galaxy* has printed some good stuff, but nothing deserving more praise than some stories ASF, AMAZING or STARTLING have written.

This particular issue offers one of the largest reader columns yet. I have a few comments to spray on various letter hacks this time, so, to get on with it.

Mr. Seymour Schwartz: The letter section would be dull as hell without a few complaints now and then. Such as yours, I might add.

Mr. Jack Whitt: I can't think of anything I would rather not do than trying to predict the future of science fiction. It would be inaccurate at best.

R. J. Banks: Don't you think you are being rather unfair? Mr. Browne doesn't care for fan fiction (I trust I'm not putting words in your mouth, H. B.), so you don't read AMAZING well, at least you're honest.

I have noticed in your letter columns from time to time a group of letters dedicated to the purpose of reviving Shaver. Now, if it isn't his abominable "mystery", it's all right with me. Regardless of the stench he has caused, the man can write. As proved by some of his stories under the Paul Lohrman *nom de plume*.

Looking forward to that Benson novel.

Jan Romanoff
26601 South Western
Lomita, California

Mr. Romanoff's opinions are his own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of Amazing Stories or its editors. —Ed.

WHY, MR. HOLDING!

Mr. Browne.

I've been reading your magazine for quite some time now but never felt an inclination to write. A short letter in the reader's section of the August issue prompts me to make a couple of brief remarks. I do so because I feel that my perspective very probably represents a norm.

I know little of science, read much fiction. I buy your magazine because it is a source of pleasure to me. Rating stories seems a bit absurd since it must be another way of saying I liked so and so the most, etc. I question the logic in making these technical analyses of stories, when the only really important criterion is "was it entertaining."

As the other fellow said, some issues aren't the best. It figures, shooting for a star and hitting it are a couple of different things.

You do manage to maintain an excellent average. I get a lot for my quarter and I'm happy with what I get. I don't have any

complaints, do have one comment about the covers.

Anybody who doesn't like the cover on the magazine I'm reading can either be quiet about it or go to hell.

Thanks.

Fletcher Holding
Box 182
Mammoth Springs, Wyoming

The point is, Fletch: we don't want 'em to be quiet about it! No gripe (change that to "no honest gripe") goes unheeded—and where there's enough of them on the same subject, we do something about it. Controversy is the life blood of any publication; may we never get to the point where we please everybody! —Ed.

WARNING TO MR. D. P. LYNN

Dear Mr. Browne:

After reading the August issue of AMAZING STORIES, all I can say a little breathlessly is how long has this been going on, what have I been missing all these years? Let me say to you and to Mr. Shaffer, in all seriousness, that you have a wonderful magazine. And what's the FANTASTIC ADVENTURES advertised on the back cover? Can I expect more of the same? If so, I'll hasten to buy it, and in the words of my husband who is a salesman and so leaves me a lot of time for reading, all I can say is HOT DOG!

Before I rate the stories in the August issue, let me say this: I like a lot of action, a fair sprinkling of sex, an unusual situation, and plenty of good human characters. Now, with that in mind, here's how I rate the issue.

1. FROM HIDDEN WORLDS by Milton Lesser. It has all the ingredients mentioned above, so how could it miss? And yes, I'll admit it, even tho I'm a woman and a newcomer, I've already formed my tastes, and I like this type of story. Let's have more!

2. THE WRONG SIDE OF PARADISE by Raymond F. Jones. Same comment as above only I thought the Lesser story was written better. More.

3. MARTIN THROUGH GEORGIA by Walt Sheldon. A cute little idea, and I particularly liked Mr. Sheldon's punnish title. Congratulate him.

4. THE FEATHERED WEAPON BY Chester S. Geier. A lot of good action in this one too, and the only thing I found wrong with it was that I guessed the ending in advance. Suggest that Geier take a lesson from Jones and Lesser in maintaining suspense.

5. DEATH BY DEGREES by Robert Arnette. A little slow-moving, I thought, but I liked the old-timer and his story.

6. A DAY TO FORGET by Charles Creighton. Sorry, Mr. C., but one story has to be in last place! But I liked this one too.

Need I say more? You'll hear from me again, Mr. Browne, and meanwhile, if the next issue is as good as this one, we might

even make a reader out of my husband!

Mrs. D. P. Lynn
48 Nancy Boulevard
Merrick, New York

CHALLENGE TO THE EDITORS

Dear Mr. Browne:

I think that it would be valuable to the best interests of all concerned with AMAZING STORIES if you would state, either in the letter column or in your editorial, exactly what age and mentality group AMAZING is aimed for, as well as your opinion of the stories you publish.

It would no doubt be of great interest to learn what would happen to your circulation figures after such an announcement.

I have no doubts that such an announcement will never be made, inasmuch as you wouldn't dare to do it.

Robert Birnbaum
2059 Ford Street
Brooklyn 29, New York

Here is the statement Reader Birnbaum requests: Amazing Stories is "aimed" directly at all readers who like well-plotted, strong action yarns about believable people and their problems—when those problems involve the ingredients that go to make up "science" fiction. The age group at which such stories are "aimed" is from six to ninety-six—and even those boundaries are elastic! My personal opinions of the stories we publish is answered by the fact that I personally select every story appearing in both Amazing Stories and Fantastic Adventures. These selections are determined by the fact that each story is well-plotted, has strong action and purposeful dialogue, etc. Because I like the stories we buy, and because I humbly hope the majority of our readers will like them too, they appear in these pages. I know of no other way to select fiction for a large readership.

—HB

ITEM BY ITEM....

L'Editor:

An Itemized Account of the Volume 25, Number 8 ish of AMAZING STORIES (August 1951, A. D.)

ITEM ONE. This ish's cover is fair, not sensational, just fair. I've seen better and I've seen worse. Why don't you use polka-dot covers? Gernsback did that on Wonder-stories back in '32 an' the fans used to rave 'bout what they saw when viewing 'em under magnifying glasses.

ITEM TWO. Keep your "Men Behind Amazing Stories", and especially keep the pic on the back side of one of the covers as it reproduced 'em better. TWS used to have a similar article, but it was hard to tell the author's pic from the rest of the page, as it was printed on pulp paper and it didn't take too well.

ITEM THREE. Why don't you use some

of Charles Addams' cartoons to brighten up the zine, he does some real Amazing ones (glance over various ishes of *New Yorker* for examples).

ITEM FOUR. Now for the stories:

1) "The Wrong Side of Paradise"; Jones really outdid himself on this one, it's real good. The illo was fair, but the reproduction is better.

2) "The Feathered Weapon" —maybe it's because I like Chet a lot (like "Hidden City" and "Soul Stealers"), but it's still a good tale. Illo's so-so.

3) "Martian Through Georgia" —a real neat short, more of this sort, pleez. The illo for this one real good.

4) "From Hidden Worlds" —you know, I'm beginning to like Lesser. Say, perchance is he a pen name, Roger P. Graham? The artist, Ed Valigursky, is all right, try to use him some more.

5) "A Day to Forget" —I seem to like novelets a little better than shorts. All the yarns in this ish are superb.

6) "Death by Degrees" —good but, compared to the rest, last. I really like Valigursky—isn't he new?

ITEM FIVE

2-0

Now I shall turn my Z sub-etheric vibrator toward other parts of the ish, starting with

ITEM SIX. Who's Edwin Benson (author of "A World He Never Made", feature novel for September). That's a pen name for R. A. P. and the ol' cave dweller himself, Richard S. Shaver (source: NFFF pen names list—Dec. '50 TNFF—and June-July *Other Worlds*—editorial where RAP reveals Shaver's pen names, though Dick Q. Razorblade used it accidentally), or is it a p.n. for somebody else??

ITEM SEVEN. I have fears this letter is not gonna be published, only my post-cards have gotten in so far.

ITEM EIGHT. The "Club House" is, as usual, good.

ITEM NINE. Disintegration of the Letter Department:

a) Robert Marlow missed one city, i.e., Pluto, West Virginia (126 pop.), or hasn't he received the news of it being discovered?

b) I won't comment on R. J.'s epistle as I viewed his pic in Fan Variety and am still to recover from the shock...he looks like a human!

c) Ahh, another "Name Withheld"—seems it's beginning to be a fan cult.

d) Romanoff mentioned the jerk who's been giving me engrams and fiendish ideas (injecting liquid in someone's veins) since he popped off against Bradbury (an indemnible sin, son) in O.W. 'bout his "...Way up in the Middle of the Air" (I hope that's right). J. R. lined 'em up right, two of a kind. If published, try not to put this in as those whom I'm talking 'bout do that mainly for publicity and I don't want to aid them.)

e) So Jarvis flunks his Latin, so do a lotta people.

Well, it seems The Anti Sea League (I

got this from 1984) hasn't blurbed too much in this ish, which is good as this argument is getting old. Say anyone wants to start up a "League Against the Use of Medium Black Oranges in Stfzines Covers" or the like?

ITEM TEN. On the inside back cover ad 'bout FA why don't you use better artists? The ones used are crummy.

ITEM ELEVEN. I could enclose some art, but...I can't draw.

David Rike
Box 203
Rodeo, California

Answers: Item One: This month (see cover) we furnish the magnifying glass!

Item Two: The advertising department froze out "Men Behind Amazing Stories" this month. We don't want to use it on pulp paper for the reasons you mention.

Item Three: Have you any idea what Charles Addams gets for one of his cartoons? Wow!

Item Four: Lesser is as real as Rog Graham—and a lot better looking! Ed Valigursky is one of our "finds"—and we're right proud of his work.

Items Five and Six: The author of "A World He Never Made" asked us to use a "house name" as this story was his first in the science-fiction field and he wanted to be sure the fans liked his work before he used his own name. Authors get some peculiar ideas at times; we do our best to humor them.

Item Seven: Your letter is published.

Item Eight: Of course.

Item Nine: No comment.

Item Ten: Looked okay to us.

Item Eleven: Your reason seems valid.

—Ed.

ALL ABOUT EVE—AND ADAM!

Dear Sir:

May I entitle my letter, in case it gets published?

ALL ABOUT SEX

If you remember from my last letter, I am one of those "sophisticated" types, and my acquaintance with s-f magazines is short, nevertheless I got all heated up over the argument, sex or no sex.

As a rule I follow the principle of the happy middle. I'm no puritan, but I'm not filthy, either.

There is, according to my opinion, nothing wrong with the sex. Not only that, it is a good thing because it serves a good purpose, if it serves that purpose. Abuse of sex will not change its nature, but it will give it a bad name and that is why for some people anything connected with sex is filthy.

Sex in proportions in which it appears in real life, is necessary to make the stories life-like, and together with love plot of the story it serves to warm the heart of the reader. We would not feel any sympathy

for a character who would have absolutely sexless adventures.

Also, in the illustrations and cover pictures the artist has a complete freedom of interpretation of the story even if it involves the whole Olymp of half-naked nymphs. But there are restrictions.

Most of the time the sexy pictures are designed to get attention by appealing to the emotions of the reader. When they are on the cover and attract too much attention, it scares and embarrasses those "sophisticated" like me and repels them from buying the magazine. I'm seventeen years old and my reading is more or less controlled by my parents and definitely introduction of pornographic pictures would cause their opinion of AS which I have so carefully built up to shatter to dust.

There are many which are for the sexy pictures, frankly admitting, like Glynn Davis, that they like them. Who doesn't? The man who says "I" is a liar. I like them. But they inspire desires which cannot be satisfied, produce overactive endocrine glands (I noticed that some correspondents got very scientific. O.K. I am too) and consequently mental instability, and generally affect body and mind negatively. This may be overcome but, more often, the persons of weaker will not only do not make any attempt at that but cultivate enjoyment of sexy pictures as a pleasure, which may result in complete mental degeneration of the individual. And there are very many weak-willed persons, or ignorant ones. In other words, the sexy pictures are dangerous to society. Now I was not brought up on old-fashioned or "church" ideas and I challenge anyone who thinks differently to a debate to prove my point.

On the other hand, pretty girls, just as Mrs. Cloer says, make illustrations and covers attractive. Their attractiveness is a good enough reason for printing their pictures. There would be nothing wrong, even with naked girls drawn for the art's sake, if it was not for their unfortunate effect on mind.

So here is my final opinion: have as many girls as you want on the cover and otherwise, but, please, keep their charms covered.

Paul Wyszhowski
129 Lawton Boulevard
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

P. S. My apologies to Mr. C. S. Geier. After reading it, I found "You'll Die on Ganymede" an excellent story.

WHERE TO WRITE

Dear Ed,

I wanted to write to you, but I didn't know where to write. I finally decided to write in care of the publishing company. I hope this letter reaches you. I am probably only one of the people confused about this. It would be nice if you would tell where to send letters right in the Reader's Forum.

I am a new reader of Science-Fiction and I have three copies of A.S. My copies are April, June, and July issues and I intend to buy all the forthcoming issues, but is there a May issue? If there is I would appreciate it if someone who has one they don't want would contact me. My address is at the end of this letter. I would also like to hear from someone who has some other back issues of A.S. and F.A.

Now that I have asked favors I will comment on your mag. The story "We the Machine" in your July issue is the best science fiction story I have read. "The Glory That was Rome" in the April issue is a wonderful adventure story, but don't get me wrong, I like adventure too.

Nancy C. Mills
R. D. 8, Box 1072
Akron 10, Ohio

Address all letters to "The Reader's Forum", % Amazing Stories, 366 Madison Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.

—Ed.

WHAT ABOUT SHAVER?

Dear Editor,

It's been a long time since I've written to your magazine, but some of the letters in your Reader's Forum about the Shaver Mystery, plus the article "Through the Interstellar Looking Glass" in Life, May 21, have got me going again.

I heartily agree with those who want Shaver back, and those who remark upon the odor of the whole business. According to Life, the Shaver Mystery was banned because it threatened the sanity of the readers. Are we a nation of neurotics that can't be trusted to pick our own reading material? If it was a hoax, why wasn't it laughed out to die out of its own accord, or laughed out of existence?

It seems to me that anything that could stir up so much controversy should have been more seriously investigated instead of suppressed. Or was it, and like "flying saucers", found too hot to handle? And Shaver isn't the first author to claim his stories had a background of truth. A lot of people seem to have gone to a lot of trouble to keep the readers from learning any more.

Why can't the cavern stories be printed with all reference to truth left out? Once there were many of us who felt this way. Am I now the only "voice crying in the wilderness"?

Thanks for listening.

Mrs. Sherry Andris
2039 MacArthur Boulevard
Oakland, California

Nothing, Mrs. Andris, has been suppressed, believe us! Life Magazine's reporting on why we no longer publish the Shaver "mystery" was not accurate, for it is not within our powers to tell people what they should or should not read—and even if it were, we would decline to do so. Shaver's

"claim" that his stories were true had nothing to do with either our buying them in the first place or dropping them in the second. As we've said before, the majority of our readers lost interest in them, said so, and we bought no more. True: it makes a far more interesting matter to hint that some mysterious "order" caused us to discontinue the series; but it wouldn't be true.

—Ed.

NOW WE KNOW....

Dear Editor:

I happened to see that filler article in the latest Amazing on the possible back ground or cause of the Biblical Flood. I would like to add a few words if I may.

In the Book of Genesis Moses speaks of God dividing the waters into those above the heavens and those below. Later he speaks of the fact that it had never rained on the Earth but that a mist went forth to water the Earth. He also speaks of the rainbow being a sign that there would never again be a flood of that nature.

A lot of people have laughed about that as they said the rainbow was a natural occurence and could not have suddenly appeared at that time. However, let us go on a bit further. From the evidence of the mammoths found in the Arctic regions it is known that these regions were originally a good deal warmer than they are now.

The evidence is also that these creatures were killed within the space of a few minutes or hours and frozen in the position where they fell. Also the latest discoveries indicate that ages ago the continents were low-lying and often connected by land bridges. The seas were shallow and the air was both warm and moist.

Putting all these things together it would seem that in the beginning the Earth was a very different place from what it is now. It was encircled by a dense cloud envelope which held the heat in and made a balmy climate from pole to pole instead of radiating the heat away at night.

Since there was no direct evaporation it could not rain as it now does but plants took needed moisture out of the atmosphere while the moisture would condense like dew instead of raining. Since the sun could not shine through such an envelope there could be no rainbow.

Whether you say that it was God, as Moses said it was, or accident; the cloud envelope was condensed and fell as rain. This rain filled the shallow seas to the depths they now have and since the cloud envelope could no longer hold in the heat the poles became the barren wastes that they are today.

The air was no longer so moist while the sun could get through to evaporate the water to make rain. At the same time the rainbow could appear. So the appearance of the rainbow was proof that there would no longer be such a flood for the cloud envelope that produced it was gone.

There is a lot of evidence that some such thing did happen which would also account for the changed appearance of the deserts and for such occurrences as marine fossils hundreds of miles from the ocean.

Also there is an ancient city that was built several thousand years ago on the site of another city which was very little older. Yet the two sites were separated by a layer five feet thick of fine sand that had been laid down in water as in a great flood.

I make no pretense of knowing exactly what the actual conditions were at that time. However, for my money, Moses was a very smart cookie. I simply desire to show how the most ancient record could fit in with what modern science has found out.

I offer it simply as a possible explanation of certain phraseology in that same record.

Edwin Sigler
546 Ellis
Wichita 9, Kansas

P. S.

I have ceased purchasing your magazines as I previously stated. I simply bought this copy so I could comment on that filler.

HELP WANTED

Dear Editor

At long last, I've reached the point where I can no longer keep my feelings pent up. In short, I'm going to state my views on the controversy currently raging in your magazine.

On the subject of your covers, I guess I'm on the "pro" and "con" sides both. Reason being: I for one like them all, well, most of them, anyway. Only *one* thing burns me up. That is to see the hero clad in a space suit and all the rest of the gear like they usually have and yet the heroine can go roaming around out in space clad in nothing but a wisp of cheesecloth! Now, I've always been under the impression that in outer space there is absolutely NO air! If such is the case, how in the name of...does the heroine breathe? Now, don't get me wrong, I like the heroine clad as she is but I'd like to see something that is possible. And I definitely do not think that woman, any woman, can go roaming around space without a suit on and live. Weaker sex or not!! If necessary, give the heroine a transparent plastic spacesuit or else take the spacesuit off the hero, but keep them the same, please!!

Can you or any of your readers help me? I'd like to get a copy of all the magazines that contained any story or article on the Shaver Mystery. All the copies I had were lost about two months ago and, being stationed this far up North, it's sort of hard to get out and track any copies down.

This is my first letter to you and except for that brickbat about the covers, I have nothing but praise, praise and more

of the same for you and the magazine.

This will probably never see print, but at last I've relieved my feelings somewhat. Keep up the good work.

SH/61159 L/Cpl Frank C. S. Young
18 Coy. RCASC, MPO-1015
Fort Churchill, Manitoba, Canada

RADIO MESSAGES FROM SPACE?

Dear Mr. Browne:

AMAZING STORIES is an excellent stf magazine. I enjoy it very much and may now be counted a regular reader. New to the science fiction field of literature, I find it crosses one of my other interests quite frequently. That is, Radio.

Which brings me to Lee Owens' feature in the August AMAZING, "The Dying Stars." Radio waves from space! This is the second time I have come across an article along that line.

RADIO AND TELEVISION NEWS, June 1951, had an article on the Naval Research Laboratories' 600-inch Radio Telescope but, as in Mr. Owens' article, some of the details I would like to have are missing.

Is there any book, scientific report, etc., available which would go into this matter a little more in detail? If so, I would appreciate receiving the name and source.

Maybe I'll build a receiver and a small telescope. Would enjoy hearing from anyone with similar ideas.

Also, maybe the editor of AMAZING STORIES and the editor of RADIO AND TELEVISION NEWS could get together and come up with an article in the latter for building a receiver capable of picking up those emanations from space, eh?

Well, in any case, I enjoy AMAZING very much and am looking forward to the next issue.

Thanking you for your attention here.

Donald A. Donaldson
704 South Dearborn
Chicago, Illinois

Readers who can answer Mr. Donaldson may answer him direct or through the columns of this department. —Ed.

EVERYTHING'S FINE!

Dear Mr. Browne,

This is my first letter to any S.F. mag. However, your August issue was so good I decided to break silence and write a letter. So I'm writing to my favorite mag.

I'm not taking sides in the bare 'em vs. bury 'em cover topic. I just say, "Editor knows best," though I will admit that some letters (namely, "Mrs. Name With-Held") go to the extremes of prudishness. I agree with Arline Gingold that teen-agers shouldn't apologize for their age. I'm 15 and proud of it. Sometimes teen-agers are just as good, if not better far than, some adults.

"The Wrong Side of Paradise" was the best story in the ish. It had, oddly enough, an original idea. Of course, anything by R. F. Jones is good.

"Martian Through Georgia" was second, in my opinion, largely through the very funny pun in the title.

The others were all too well written to make any one lower than the other.

As usual, the short shorts, in which your mag is unique, were all good.

The cover was excellent and so were all the inside illos, naturally.

I need back issues badly. So, if this sees print, will any of you fans with back issues of AMAZING and/or FANTASTIC Novels please send me your price list?

Gary Pickersgill
Box 270
Sheldon, Iowa

Thanks, Gary!

—Ed.

WANTED: A SMALL DOG

Dear Editor,

Unlike many other contributors to this department, I have no axe to grind. I read everything I can buy on Amazing topics. Some are good and some not so good but I don't complain—what I don't like someone else will. I just finished A. Merritt's "Ship of Ishtar" and really enjoyed it.

I have, in good condition, about 100 or more magazines—A mazing, Fantastic, Startling, etc. I want to trade them for a little dog. I want a female Chihuahua or small toy fox terrier. I want to raise some tiny puppies. This is my hobby as I am not too well since I was struck by a car last year.

If any dog fanciers reads this I hope they will write to me. I have my tiny red Chihuahua, "Pinky", on my lap as I write this.

I will buy your magazine as long as you publish it.

Mrs. Valda D. Forsyth
617 Spring
Jamestown, New York

Let us know how you make out, Mrs. Forsyth.

—Ed.

THE 'E' DOES IT!

Dear Sir:

I see that you spell your last name the same as I do. The "e" on the end of the "brown" has put me thinking. I have a theory. Said theory is that spelling determines nationality, therefore I would think that a person who spelled the word "brown" as Braun would be German, and one who spelled it Brown would be English, and likewise one who spelled it Browne (due to the fact that I am Irish and can trace my ancestry back quite a way) would be Irish. Seeing your name spelled with an "e" has set me wondering as to whether my theory

is right or not. What do you think?"

But now to the important business. I have read about five or six of your magazines, both *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, and find them inferior, in both story and make-up, to such magazines as *Astounding*, *Galaxy*, and *Marvel*. I will admit it is a wee bit unfair to base my judgement on such scant knowledge of your magazine as 5 or 6 issues provide; however, that is how it will stand until something forces me to change it.

One other remark. In your article "Giants of the Earth" the question was asked, "Was earth ever populated by giants?" Well, I read somewhere ('tis a terrible fellow I am that I cannot name references) that in the time of King Art and the round table and even farther back in the good old days, that an ordinary man or average man if you prefer the term was not as big as he is today and, therefore, a man 6 feet or over would be a giant. Oh, what would they do with some of today's basketball players.

John Browne
1750 East 70th Street
Cleveland 3, Ohio

Your theories on names are interesting, but your editor has nothing to add or subtract on the subject.... We doubt if the difference between man's height five hundred years ago and what it is today was so great that a six-footer would be called a giant!

—Ed.

SOME REMARKS ON THE MACHINE AGE

Dear HB:

I have just finished reading Gerry Vance's "We, the Machine". Comment: Terrific!!! (slightly, if not more)

In this story, Vance has once again brought forth a variation on an old theme: a dynamic vs. a static form of civilization. But this story is a variation on that theme; namely, the dynamic vs. a static form of civilization that is detrimental to the best interests of the human race.

The machine was said to have become insane. Yet some statements supposedly made by the machine indicate that it was originally unbalanced. One instance of this is the quotation "there is no need of creative scientists to further perfect the Machine. It is perfection in itself. . . ." Isn't this an indication of some form of egotism? Perhaps delusions of omnipotence... megalomania?

Once a group, race or culture loses its ability to perceive, to understand its environment or the features of its life, it is gone. Once it loses its ability to create, it is finished. A static (i.e., not-ever-expanding) civilization that does retain these characteristics would not be detrimental to the race.

If and when luxuries become necessities to a way of life, then that way of life...

rather the group that employs that way of life, would tend to lose its adaptability to conditions of its environment. If a race loses that, then it is doomed.

The human mind has a tendency...and a disturbing one...to accept any environment after a while. But that is not the type of adaptability that I mentioned above. Especially if that environment detracts from the best interests of the human. Correct adaptability should first enable survival in said malignant environment, and then enable the possessor to bend that environment to him, not him to the environment.

This false adaptability leads to decadence, and eventual destruction of a race.

A decadent group that has lost the aforementioned vital requirements may or may not deserve to continue existence. And if there be another group that does possess them...But what if all things are privileged to have a place in the Great Scheme of Things...if there be such...there is not enough space here to go into that.

A people that cannot rely any longer upon themselves, but must turn to another agency to completely run their lives...the agency...the so-called Welfare State...the biggest semantic fraud ever perpetrated upon a people...something for nothing...

Quote page 30...“have you ever cared, really cared...where your food comes from...how your pants are pressed...”etc. When a group or entity does not care nor question the details of its environment...why exist?

This is difficult for me to express, since I...since my mind is conditioned to dynamic instead of static thought....

Something in here strikes me funny....the author's “The Executive Divison—it was only a human brain!” Only, he says. What is greater than said brain? The concepts it creates, perhaps?

HB, could it be possible to have this published in the Reader's Forum? I'd like to get the other readers' opinions on some of my statements. What do you think, by the way? Like to hear from you on that.

“Who Sows the Wind” in the last issue was also very good. I'd say that both AS and FS are really developing and rising out of a bad slump. Especially Fantastic.

Bouquets on the new paper quality. Now maybe trimmed edges, huh? (If you can't get the paper supplied that way, why not give somebody a job. Said person would sit down in the basement with a razor in hand and trim the edges.

Good letter column. Hey, who's this character that goes by my name, living at my house? May be Comrade Shaver and the deros again.

Echo your sentiments. To Wayne L. Fehe: What's an LHB?

To Bob Jones: What is SF anyway? that sex must cure its ailments?

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A LITTLE OF EVERYTHING

Dear Editor:

What's all this? What's happened in the three issues of AMAZING I've missed? Who's this strange "Mr. Reed" who I gather has slandered my favorite type of...er...literature? Who's "Name Withheld" (Ooops!)? When did you move to New York? When did Paul Ganley mention my fanzine, BIZARRE, as "quantity"?

Geeze, a fan certainly can lose contact with fandom by missing just three little issues of a mag! Someone once argued that prozines were necessary to fandom. I thought not, but now....

Even old AMAZING itself seems to have changed during these three months. And the changes are much for the better! I've always wanted to see something like the short on Raymond F. Jones in the prozines, keep it up! And the superbly long letter column! If you'll glance back through your letter files (though I doubt it would be possible for you to keep such things), you'll find that I was *one* of the loudest grippers about your short letter column "way back then". Well, it seems "way back then" to me. I've really missed the mags!

Once a fan, always a fan! Not even the old USN can intervene.

But it came damn near it.

Your stories, though, don't seem to have changed much. They're still the same old kind of thing; some good and some bad, but I like them. Well, sorta.

There is but one stinker in this August issue—the only one which I haven't finished yet. I usually like Geier's work, but "The Feathered Weapon" just didn't hit me the way a story should. I think I know what's wrong, too!

To have a good story, an author must have his readers in sympathy with the characters; they must feel that they know and like them. How can I like a guy who would drag his girl into a murder rap? I might if he were a living person and one of my friends, but in a story, no.

Also, how can I sympathize with a girl who mistrusts her boy friend at the slightest evidence that he has been up to no good? Nope, just ain't done.

It may have been the above which is responsible, but I also felt that the characters weren't characters enough. Seems the characterization wasn't quite as "human" as it is in most of Geier's stories. It may have been the fact that I thought of the yarn as the "crash-bang" type though, and never have liked the "dashing, superman" type of character.

Anyway, something's wrong.

Maybe I should have read the story through before I went so far as to comment on it. There's a bare possibility that I wasn't supposed to like the characters. But, so far, it doesn't seem like one of those stories in which the reader knows the hero is a heel and hopes he gets killed, either. If it is, it's the most subtle one I've

seen in a long time.

Of the rest of the stories, I believe Milton Lesser's "From Hidden Worlds" was the best. New author too! Or is he a pen name? I remember reading several of his stories (about two) in AMAZING before I joined the Navy, but I don't believe any of them outdid Jones, Sheldon, or Creighton. He is improving!

Of course Sheldon and Jones weren't far behind this time. "The Wrong Side of Paradise" seemed a little too much like a fairy tale and "Martian Through Georgia" was implausible. Otherwise both were pretty good stories. Sheldon is one of my favorite authors. This is the first of his stories I've noticed as having anything wrong with it. Maybe I'm getting hard to please.

Or, I hope, more observant.

Your illos are still fair, but not wonderful, superb or magnificent. They seem very much the same as of old, even though the only name I recognize is Krupa. Cover's the same type, too—rather nice.

My vote: Do away with the naked women. We get to see plenty of them elsewhere—when we care to.

As for Shaver, I don't believe in caverns or deros and don't want to read any stories which try to tell me that they really exist, but Shaver is one of the best writers among the stf'ers and deserves a place on the pages of AS and FA. He's been doing some very good work for you and Other Worlds under various pen names. Why not just label his stories "Richard S. Shaver" and tell him to stay away from deros. I think fandom would be able to read him with an unprejudiced eye and would accept him again as a wonderful storyteller.

We may not believe in Dianetics, but we still gobble Hubbard science fiction when we get the chance.

I disagree with "Name Withheld" (Gad! Another one!) in that an editor as a harder time than an author. Though the former may have to exercise a critical eye as to what he buys and prints, that eye is more or less a natural thing. He knows a good story when he sees it, and he knows what type of good story he wants. Therefore, all he has to do is read a story and classify it as to worth and type in his mind to know whether to accept it or not. He doesn't even have to know what's wrong with it if he doesn't like it. All he has to do is grab a trite little printed rejection slip (Damn the things!) and stick it into the return envelope.

As for balancing the issue of the magazine as to what types of story should go here and what type should go there, he has them on hand—all he has to do is reach in the files and pull them out. With a system of mental classification, it's not hard to decide which to use where.

On the other hand, an author really gets the short end of the deal. Let us say that he's struggled through the lean years (the period in which he doesn't know whether

he's got it or hasn't) and has his full quota of beginner's disappointments (1,000—1,000,000). From dawn till dusk he plugs away at his typewriter not ever knowing whether what he's writing has the least chance of bringing a check or not; three-fourths of the time knowing that he has to write it over, or over and over, before he can send it off and begin his *long* anxious wait. Then, at the end of the wait, what might he get—a little blue slip of paper with a formal printed message on it.

But suppose his story does sell? What's he got? 1/8 to 2 cents per word! Suppose he sells another story and another. And another and another and another. How much money does he make in a year? About as much as the scrubwoman down at the movies.

Now back to the editor: He plugs at his typewriter from dawn till dusk too. But he knows what he's writing will see print. He has a regular paying job. Of course he's probably had to sweat out a writer's career to get it, but that's beside the point. Editorship is the reward, the climax, to long years of worrying and writing. How, then, could it be more trying than writing?

This letter is getting too long, so I've got to close. Many, many thanks to R. J. Banks for saying BIZARRE has quality. Of course I know it's better than his mag, UTOPIAN, but I don't expect him to admit it.

No, I won't do that to him! UTOPIAN is a great fan mag! I don't know what five mags Paul Ganley picked as the first five but I believe UTOPIAN was worthy of a place among them.

SA. Tom Covington, USN
"T" Division
Submarine Administration
Mare Island, California

"DISAPPOINTED!"

Dear Editor:

I never read your magazine until I happened to pick up one my young brother had finished with. Carelessly leafing through the pages I really expected to be amused by an "infantile thriller-diller". I was disappointed, so now I am one of your most faithful readers.

Most of the gripes are about sexy covers. I agree. I notice that do-gooders or persons like them are instantly prejudiced if AMAZING has seductive females hovering about the scene. Of course, these folk are totally unfair in that judgment, but *some* of the frontispieces are misleading. Others represent a lot of some artists' hard work. These are the best covers. I'd be glad if more spaceship adventures are involved. I don't mind the drawings inside.

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SAM MERWIN'S

SCIENCE FICTION

BOOKCASE

GREAT STORIES OF SCIENCE FICTION, edited by Murray Leinster with an introduction by Clifton Fadiman, Random House, New York (\$2.95).

And still they keep coming, rolling or staggering off the publishers' presses of the land. We're speaking of stf anthologies, of course. Surely by this time there must be enough of them in print to run all the mystery-detective anthologies right through the rear wall of any respectable-sized lending library.

However, veteran science fiction author Murray Leinster has come up with an excellent group of stories, most of them, praise Zoroaster, longer than is usual with such collections. In fact the only weak spot is the introduction by the august Mr. Fadiman, who runs with heavy feet from Virgil's *Aeneid*, through such fine full fustian as "... As the sunflower to the sun, so the Machine's iron face turns forever toward the shape of things to come...", through Max Eastman, Henry Adams, President Conant of Harvard, W. H. Auden, Arthur Koestler, Ghandi and even Baudelaire, and others, a few of whom have actually some connection with stf.

The contents page, however, contains the names of more familiar craftsmen—Ralph Milne Farley, Cleve Cartmill, Malcolm Jameson, C. L. Moore, Anthony Boucher, Theodore Sturgeon, Lewis Padgett and others, including anthologist Leinster under his own name and that of his real-life alter-ego, Will F. Jenkins. We liked best Jameson's *BLIND ALLEY, IN HIDING* by Wilmar H. Shiras, Boucher's *THE CHRONOKINESIS OF JONATHAN HULL* and Jenkins' *SYMBIOSIS*. But both quality and entertainment levels are high throughout and each reader will have to pick his own favorites.

* * *

BEYOND INFINITY by Robert Spencer Carr, Fantasy Press, Reading, Pennsylvania (\$2.75).

Mr. Carr, a slick and sensitive writer indeed, seems more preoccupied with the romantic possibilities of what space-flight

and alien invasion may do to people of greater and lesser importance right here on wretched old Earth than he does with the gadgetry and trappings of space-flight and invasion themselves. As such he has attained a certain symbolic quality (we suspect quite deliberately) that may seem even a little whimsy with the whimsy to the more hard-boiled space-opera addicts of current stf.

But for those who can live without pirates of the void and the like, this author has a great deal to offer in the way both of entertainment and in the provocation of thought. As such his themes are secondary to the results and reactions they cause, matter little in themselves same as devices.

In the longest of the four novelets that compose this volume—*BEYOND INFINITY*—he takes an old and generally discredited theory about time travel—that exceeding the speed of light will bring such travelers back younger than when they started—and makes of it a touching and dramatic human story.

In *MORNING STAR* he revives the old legend of Venus as an actual planet of female and highly fertile love, turns it into a delightful sort of cosmic joke. In *THOSE MEN FROM MARS* he has an alien visitor land on the White House lawn and make Cold-Wartorn officials look like the harassed little men they are. And in *MUTATION* he deals with the creation of a new and nobler sort of superman. All of these are hoary old chestnuts of plots. But what Mr. Carr does with them makes his fine little collection a must for any stf reader given to thought in any form.

* * *

TYPEWRITER IN THE SKY and **FEAR** BY L. Ron Hubbard, Gnome Press, New York (\$2.75).

In the first of these two short novels the founder of "the science of mental health" takes off on one of his typical double-personality, split-time Captain Applejack pirate themes, in which the friend of a novelist finds himself actually living

dangerously in the pages of a book in production. We have an idea it serves him right for running around with such dangerous characters as authors.

In the second, with considerably less success, Hubbard tackles a sort of psychological mystery-suspense. In it a man named Lowry finds himself suffering from a brief amnesia as well as a loss of hat and, when he solves his riddle, discovers himself to be more than a single murderer. Nice chap if you go for M and the like. You like Hubbard, you'll like the book. On the whole we did.

* * *

THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES by Ray Bradbury, Bantam Books, New York (25c).

What was probably the finest of sf books published last year is at last out in two-bit form—and mercifully unabridged. Those who have yet to read **THE THIRD EXPEDITION, —AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT, NIGHT MEETING, THE SILENT TOWNS, THE MILLION-YEAR PICNIC** and other Bradbury classics included ought to visit their neighborhood psychiatrist if they don't grab this chance to do so—and everyone knows that those who visit psychiatrists ought to have their heads examined. Enough said.

*"What One
Man Knows . . ."*
by Ralph Cox

WE LIKE to think that work on atomic energy is pretty well guarded—and it is. True, a lot of spies and traitors have been uncovered in recent years and there is no doubt that the Soviets got a lot of information on atomic physics this way. But they also got a lot more information by "listening in on the party-line" which goes into operation every time an atomic bomb is exploded and which anyone can hear if he's got the equipment.

The "party line" is, of course, the upper atmosphere and the wind currents which carry the products of atomic fission far and wide over the world. Sampling planes sent into the atmosphere over Siberia, let's say, equipped with suitable counters and detectors, can get an excellent idea of just what kind of an atomic explosion went off in Nevada. There's no way to stop this.

Conversely, the U.S. and European physicists can pick up the Soviet party line by the very same methods. We have an excellent picture of Soviet atomic progress obtained in just this way. Advances in science are, fortunately or unfortunately, just like cryptograms; no matter how complex and confusing a code may be made, it was made by men—therefore it can be interpreted and analyzed by other men. There ain't no secrets!



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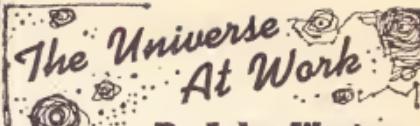
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By John Weston

THE ENGLISH astronomer Fred Hoyle has stirred up more than a tempest in the teapot of modern cosmology with his famous book, "The Nature of the Universe." His rather radical ideas are causing the bigwig theoreticians of astronomy and astrophysics to do considerable thinking. Because his reasoning is a blend of mathematical theorizing and qualitative discussion based on rigid physical data, the astronomical world is lending more and more credence to Hoyle's major idea. And that idea is really amazing.

He says, in effect: you can't think of our universe as having either a beginning or an end or that it is aged in the conventional sense of time. The universe is like permanence itself—it always was and it always will be. Actually this, in itself, doesn't say much, but what it implies is terrific. Ordinary astronomy has long believed that the universe of suns and galaxies, of island universes and nebulae, was running down, was wearing out, and that, in time, the whole system would die of the "heat death."

According to Hoyle this is incorrect and he bases his criticism on a very sound piece of datum. It is known that the vacuum of interstellar space is not really a perfect vacuum. No place is. There are extremely thin and tenuous gases distributed throughout the whole universe, wherever the telescopic eye can penetrate. The distribution is remarkably uniform, too. As a matter of fact, these rarefied atoms constitute the major portion of matter in the world-system—more in mass and bulk by far than the entire multiplicity of all stars and galaxies! Now the stars sweep through space at varying speeds and, like vast brooms, sweep up this atomic detritus and debris, "re-fueling" themselves in the process and creating a perpetual self-sustaining energy system.

Hoyle points out that this is not only happening now, but that this has always been going on, in a sort of endless cycle. The universe is neither young nor old but is simply in its constant state of flux and change, never ceasing this activity. As fast as the gaseous matter distributed throughout space is swept up, it is replaced by other matter, perhaps from an exploding star and perhaps by atomic reaction within the gas clouds themselves.

Naturally these surprising ideas can't be put to an immediate test but observation, improving as it is with better instrumentation, tends to confirm these beliefs. The role of stellar gas in cosmology has long been sought and this may be the very explanation. Closer to home, our own Sun

is sweeping through space, picking up vast amounts of detritus and feeding them into its atomic furnace, only to spew out vaster amounts of energy. The stars in their course feed themselves like a whale speeding through a school of fish with an open mouth.

Whatever the ultimate analysis of Hoyle's views, it is certain that he has stirred up astronomy as nothing has since Eddington and Jeans themselves. Like those men, Hoyle sees that the universe is not what it seems....

BEYOND THE WALLS OF SPACE

(Continued From Page 43)

The traitor Lura thought to use it to destroy what the Ancients had built. But the Ancients were all-wise and built in me the power to destroy the field should any try to usurp it. Thallom must now remain unmoving in space, unless you command that I restore the energy field. Such is the Law."

Blaine looked down at the girl. Her eyes were glowing with a proud light now. She shook her head slowly at the great robot. "Let the field remain dead, O Sacred Robot. Thallom may find a home in this solar system and its people live in peace and flourish with the life-giving energies of the sun-star called Sol."

The robot's voice came sonorously. "So be it, my Queen. Rule Thallom wisely, and gain counsel in the Sacred Chamber. The Earthman may leave in peace."

Noreen took Blaine's hand then and walked with him across the great pages of the Book of Law. They passed the shield of Targal emblazoned in the metal plates and she paused to gaze back at the line of statuary behind them.

"My father's likeness will be there soon," she said reverently.

Blaine nodded. "You will make a great queen, Noreen."

She looked up at him. "And what

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of you, Rex Blaine? Will you be returning to your own planet now with your other Earthmen?"

Blaine nodded. "I will. And I will tell my people of your great race and of the tenth planet in our system. Together we will build a mighty solar family...."

"Together?" her voice was low. "Will you return then to Thallom?"

He took her tenderly in his arms. "I will return, Noreen. The whole universe could not keep me from you. Not even the seal of the Targal or your Sacred Robot."

She smiled wistfully up at him. "The Targal, Rex? No Targal has done more for Thallom than you. And our son shall be the greatest Targal of all...someday...."

Her lips were close to his then, and he met them with his own.

And beneath them the great seal of the Targals of Thallom glowed. The sealed portals of the chamber swung open for them and they left the great Robot and walked out into the city and the cheering multitudes awaiting them....

"STEP OUT OF YOUR BODY, PLEASE!"

(Concluded From Page 131)

yours when you want it, and for as long as you want it. You can't turn your back on it."

His eyes fixed on the scene outside, he brushed slowly past her and stopped with his back to her.

"No," he said, wonder in his voice. "I can't, can I?"

Laura half lifted her arms, a dreamy light in her eyes, waiting for him to turn.

But he remained standing there, his eyes on the stars and the fire trails of ascending space ships, his broad shoulders unmoving.

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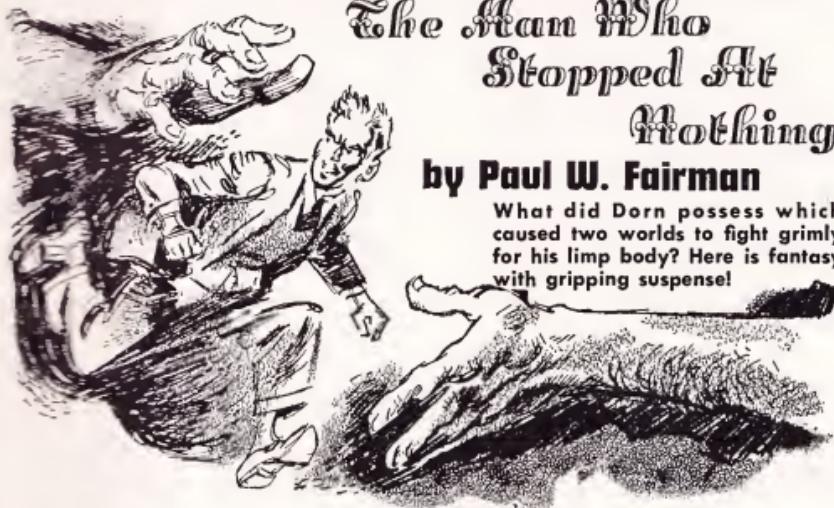
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